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Aims and Activities:

The Society was formed in 1946 to provide a forum for the exchange of information on seabirds, and land birds at sea, by members for whom birdwatching is a spare time recreation and hobby. It also aims to coordinate the efforts of individual members using standardised recording methods so that observations can be of value to the professional ornithologist. In addition to the promotion of observations afloat, the RNBWS organises fieldwork and expeditions, often in cooperation with the Army and RAF Ornithological Societies.

The Royal Naval Birdwatching Society is the only organisation in the world which collects, collates and publishes data on seabirds and landbirds at sea. Membership is open to all those, regardless of nationality, who share a common interest in birds at sea. Instructions for joining can be found on the Society website www.rnbws.org.uk or by application to the Secretary.

Subscription Rates: Members living in the UK £15; £20 for those living elsewhere. Subscriptions are due on 1 January and may be Gift Aided. Library rates: £15 plus postage (UK); £20 plus postage (outside UK).

RNBWS Record Forms: These can be found on the website. Completed forms should be sent to the Seabird Records Coordinator (address at left).

Material for publication in *Sea Swallow* should be sent to the editor. Ideally submissions should be in MS Word or rtf format, but other formats are acceptable. Graphics should be jpeg or tiff. Accompanying photographs sent electronically should always be the original camera files, and not cropped in any way. Contributions are welcome at any time, but if for inclusion in the next edition should reach the editor by 30 July.

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Chairman's foreword

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

The past year has been one of welcome change as we have moved out from under the heavy restrictions imposed to constrain the Coronavirus pandemic, and largely returned to normal life. This has benefited the Society too and it is pleasing to be able to report once again on face-to-face meetings and field trips.

Soon after publication of the previous issue, we celebrated our 75th Anniversary in fine style with 34 of us enjoying a splendid evening in the wardroom of HMS *Nelson* in Portsmouth; and having marked the sad passing of our Patron, HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh last year, the Society was represented at his memorial service in Westminster Abbey. Accounts of both events appear in this issue.

In the field, we have had two successful weekends at Portland - covering the Autumn and Spring migration periods - and a team of Mark Cutts, Tony Tindale and Roger Dickey returned to Madeira to support Frank Zino. On this occasion it was the use of night vision equipment which proved a game-changer in allowing the birds at least to be seen and counted. How things have changed from the time when *Sea Swallow* contained advice on which film to use when photographing sea birds. And while Stephen Chapman's expedition to the pubs of Cork doesn't really count as fieldwork, it was good that he was able to represent us at the Seabird Group conference once again.

As for this issue of *Sea Swallow*, I think there is plenty to interest us all. I personally enjoyed reading about Able Seaman Longbottom, an RN birdwatcher in WW1, and am especially pleased to see four reports this year from RN ships at sea. Keith Cowieson has now published the full report on the last phase of the Seabird Survey, Simmer Dim 2021, and elsewhere you can read about work in progress in Gibraltar and Madeira. Finally, there are two major articles, one on seabirds in the high North Pacific by Simon Cook, and one on the remarkable story of the Zino family endeavours over the past sixty years to conserve wildlife in the Selvagens Islands.

On that last I can add a postscript. In the late 1960s Frank Zino's father Alec got wind of a NATO plan to use the Selvagens for target practice during a forthcoming exercise. Word then went to several influential people, including Bill Bourne, then working for the BTO and already closely involved with RNBWS affairs. He pointed out that the one person who could wield some power in the matter was the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee in Brussels, none other than Admiral Sir Nigel Henderson, President of RNBWS! The Secretary of the International Council for Bird Preservation then wrote to Sir Nigel who replied that he had taken the matter up immediately, "and am happy to be able to tell you that this idea of using these islands as targets for NATO naval bombardment exercises has now been abandoned."

On more general matters, I am pleased to report that the Society remains financially stable, our membership is rising gently, we have successfully streamlined the website and - thanks to Philip Boak - revitalised our social media presence. Do please visit our Facebook page to 'Like' and 'Share' some of the posts. It all helps our profile. I hope to see some of you during the course of the coming year, at the AGM, Portland or even Gibraltar in the Spring.

Just as we are about to go to press, we have learned the very sad news of the death of Her Majesty The Queen. All members of The Society will greatly mourn her passing and pledge our loyalty to His Majesty The King (an RNBWS member since 1971).

Martin Alabaster

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RNBWS at the Abbey

by Rear Admiral Martin Alabaster

His Royal Highness Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, our Patron since the 1960s, died shortly before his 100th birthday in April 2021. At the time, COVID-19 precautions were strict in the UK and so his funeral was a small affair with only a handful of his closest family in attendance. Almost a year later, with restrictions lifted, it was possible for his extraordinary life to be celebrated at an appropriate scale in Westminster Abbey. The service aimed to concentrate on Prince Philip's patronage, and representatives of some 700 charities were invited to attend. This included the RNBWS and so Stephen Chapman and I removed the mothballs from our suits and went along.

Arriving early as directed, we were well placed in the third row of the 'cheap seats' in the Nave and spent an enjoyable time spotting the great and the good as they arrived. "Isn't that Prince Kyril of Preslav?" asked Stephen, who seemed to know about these things. We were also well placed next to the Royal Marine band - if a little too close to the French horn section - and able to enjoy the clever selection of music. English composers (Byrd, Stanford, Vaughan Williams, Britten) were appropriately well represented. I was following the order of service carefully and was amused when it looked as though the band would be performing "Men of Honour" at the moment the Prime Minister (then Boris Johnson) arrived. In fact, a delay in proceedings averted this awkward conjunction.

The service itself was excellent. All the speakers made appropriate and interesting contributions, which served well in reminding us just how many causes and individuals had been helped by Prince Philip's backing. A moving account by a recent graduate of the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme highlighted that initiative as perhaps his greatest legacy but others spoke well about his role in conservation. And it was nice for me to hear the prayer giving thanks for this aspect of his life given by Canon Martin Poll, a former Chaplain of The Fleet. The choice of hymns and music was excellent and finally, the Dean's address was just right: illuminating, interesting - and short. Prince Philip would have approved.

Overall, it was an honour to represent the Society at such an occasion and a real treat to be at a proper event on a grand scale after two years of restrictions. Stephen and I celebrated with a toast to the Duke over an excellent curry lunch.

Martin Alabaster

Email: chairman@rnbws.org.uk



Plate 1. Caption. © Photographer

A fitting occasion

by David Dobson

The 75th anniversary of the establishment of the RNBWS was celebrated in style on 27 November 2021, when thirty-three members and guests gathered for dinner in the Wardroom of HMS *Nelson* - about as imposing a setting as could be.

We gathered first for a reception, leading to a masterly presentation by member Dr Nigel Hacking who talked about the difficulties of *pterodroma* identification as he took us through a long voyage across the pacific from New Zealand to Japan.



Plate 2. Dr Nigel Hacking's pre-dinner presentation. © Photographer

Then on to a fine dinner, where it was good to have friends from AOS and RAFOS with us, and though we didn't have any founder RNBWS members present - that would be asking too much - we did have the next best thing in Commander Michael Casement, whose founder member father enrolled him in the RNBWS when he entered Dartmouth in 1951, aged eighteen. It was also good to see a good spread of membership - the Royal Marines represented, the Merchant Navy, some cruise ship old hands, some long standing individual supporters - and it was particularly good to have with us one of the latest joiners, Petty Officer David Eaglen from HMS *Echo*.

How good too to have an evening where the speeches were just right (in other words commendably short), our Chairman Martin Alabaster touching on the achievements of the Society over the years, and former Chairman Michael Casement giving us a glimpse of the old days.

It was indeed an evening of which the Society can be proud, and for me the best and probably most enduring feature was the dinner menu card, which was a brilliant compendium of pictures and activities over the years, showing some of our early leaders and press snippets from the very first days. I learned for example that the appointment of the first President of the Society, Vice Admiral Sir William Tennant, was announced to the world by Admiralty signal. No such fanfare for this incumbent.



Plate 3. Mark Cutts?, RNBWS Secretary and Commander and Mrs Michael Casement.
© Photographer

In conclusion, I would like to say well done and thank you to our Secretary, Mark Cutts, who did all the donkey work, and well done too to our Chairman Martin Alabaster, who not only produced that marvellous menu-cum-teach-in, but took charge of the whole evening, and did his office and the Society proud.

David Dobson, Vice Admiral, President



Plate 4. Chairman of RNBWS Martin Alabaster and Keith Cowieson, RAFOS Field Officer. © Photographer



Plate 5. Cruise ship guide and Sea Swallow author Simon Cook, his wife Amanda with Tony Tindale, RNBWS Treasurer. © Photographer

A Royal Naval birdwatcher in World War One

by Captain MK Barritt

Introduction

In October 1916 nineteen-year-old Maurice Longbottom began his war service in the Royal Navy. He recorded his experiences in a diary which sadly was lost, but extracts covering his time in the Mediterranean were used in a lecture delivered barely three years after his demobilisation. The typescript of this lecture was passed to me for assessment of its interest to the Royal Naval Museum as an account from the lower deck. I had not read far before it was clear that I was dealing with a Royal Naval Birdwatcher.



Plate 6. Able Seaman Maurice Longbottom.
© Private collection

Maurice Longbottom was the second son of a journeyman carpenter and joiner in Silsden, Yorkshire. He developed an early love of nature in his Airedale surroundings, building up his knowledge through friendship with a local gamekeeper. He read a copy of Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*, but the family income was too precarious to cover membership, so he set up a band of his own companions with whom he spent time in the countryside. He was able to continue in part-time secondary education from the ages of 12 to 14 whilst working in a mill and then for the Co-op. His interest in natural history was encouraged by his teachers and he learned to use a microscope. He began work as a lathe turner in an engineering firm in Keighley as its activity expanded with the outbreak of World War One. In the autumn of 1916 his elder brother was reported missing presumed dead on the Somme battlefield, just a month after joining up. This determined Maurice to enlist in the Royal Navy.



Plate 7. Able Seaman Maurice Longbottom. © Private collection

The setting

Maurice Longbottom's sea service was in the Flower-class sloops HMS *Pansy* (Jan. 1917–Jun. 1918) and HMS *Dianthus* (Oct. 1918–May 1919). He took passage in the 24-class sloop HMS *Donovan* to join *Dianthus* in Gibraltar, and his bird observations began in the South Western Approaches. *Dianthus*, which had been completed as a Q-ship, was now employed in escorting convoys to Mediterranean ports between Gibraltar and Port Said. Longbottom's watch for birds was

aided by his frequent employment in the ship's crow's-nest on the lookout for enemy submarines during passages to and from Bizerte, Valletta, Port Said and Mudros Bay. He made the most of each port of call, finding his way out into the countryside.

The records

Maurice Longbottom gave his lecture to the Crosshills Natural History Society in 1921. The observations of birds and other phenomena are inserted into a chronological narrative of the proceedings of *Dianthus* and his experiences in the ports of call. It seems unlikely that he was able to equip himself with any reference books during his wartime service, though he does allude to the views of Howard Saunders, an expert of the time on *Laridae*. However, extensive quotations from *The Ornithology of Malta* published by G Despott MBOU in London in 1917, and an article on flying fish which was published in *Nature* in April 1921, suggest that his references to authorities largely arose from later studies in preparation of the lecture.¹ I comment below on whether his insertion of some scientific names (and occasionally the author) reflects prior knowledge or post-war study and analysis of the records which he had made.

Seabirds

Longbottom paid careful attention to the range and movement of species. His observations on migration began in the South Western Approaches where he sighted a flock of 20 tern, presumably 'Comic', crossing the ship's bows, and commented that their southern journey invariably begins in September. He soon made a delighted 'first acquaintance' with storm-petrels, probably the British Storm-petrel, *Hydrobates pelagicus*. He noted that toward sundown on the second day at sea he sighted a Gannet, *Sula bassana*, the last he was to see for many months, and states that 'we were then fast approaching the southern limit of its range'. More recent authorities confirm that the range of this species has extended in the course of the twentieth century, though I wonder whether the dispersal of younger birds to equatorial waters off West Africa already took place in that period.² His only sighting of a Gannet in the Mediterranean was made one day out from Gibraltar at the start of the final east-bound assignment, and this confirms that the species was rare in that sea at that time. He made his first sighting of a Puffin, *Fratercula arctica*, in the same area as the ship neared the Spanish coast on a return voyage to Gibraltar.

Like many seabird observers he showed an especial interest in the shearwaters, recording Manx Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus*, as 'fairly common' from the first day of departure from Falmouth. During the subsequent passage to Gibraltar he noted some which 'resembled in general build and flight the Manx Shearwater of our own seas, but were larger and had brown, instead of black, upper parts'. These seem likely to have been Cory's Shearwater, *Calonectris borealis*. Off the North African coast he could not get a close observation of shearwaters, but noted that the common species reported in the sea were the 'Levantine Shearwater, *Puffinus kuhli*' and the more plentiful 'Mediterranean Shearwater, *Puffinus yelkouan*'. It is the latter species which is now designated as the Levantine race of the Manx Shearwater, whilst the former is named the Mediterranean Shearwater, *Calonectris diomedea*. Longbottom states that both birds bred along the southern cliffs of the Maltese islands. *BirdLife* Malta now has a project underway to protect the breeding Scopoli's Shearwater, *Calonectris diomedea*, and Yelkouan Shearwater, *Puffinus puffinus yelkouan*.³

¹ Despott's observations were first published in *Ibis* (10), in July 1917.

² Harrison, *Seabirds*, p288.

³ <https://birdlifemalta.org/conservation/malta-seabird-project/> [accessed January 2022].

In the Mediterranean Longbottom made careful notes of the range from land at which gulls accompanied the ship, observing that they invariably left at dusk and reappeared after sunrise. He surmised that they returned to cliff ledges or slept in parties on the surface of more sheltered coastal waters, spreading out from there to feed. He particularly noted the regular company of Kittiwakes, *Larus tridactyla*, first sighted when two days out of Malta westbound. In the approaches to Bizerte harbour he had sighted three species of gull, which he identified as Lesser Black-backed, *Larus fuscus*, the sub-specific Yellow-legged Herring Gull, *Larus cachinnans* (Pallas) - probably the sub-species now designated *Larus argentatus michahellis*, and the Mediterranean Black-headed Gull, *Larus melanocephalus* - now named the Mediterranean Gull. He notes, however, that: 'I must state that at the time I erred in taking this for granted, for I have since learnt that our Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) occurs, though not so commonly, in parts of the Mediterranean during the winter months'.

This does indicate that Longbottom had a knowledge of species distribution before he joined the Navy. His later reports from the western basin of the Mediterranean include Lesser Black-backed Gulls and he made detailed notes of the spiralling soar of flocks of this species and the Yellow-legged Herring Gull. On Armistice Day, as *Dianthus* steamed further east along the North African coast, he noted 'a few gulls, probably Herring and Lesser Black-backed'. At Port Said he recorded that 'The Black-headed Gull was by far the most common of the gulls noticed in the harbour'.

Landbirds

Longbottom first deployed into the Mediterranean during the time of the autumn migration, and noted southbound Swallows, House Martins *Delichon urbicum*, Wheatears *Oenanthe oenanthe* and Redstarts *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*. 'The *Hirundinidae* flew around the ship for some time and one of the Swallows tried in vain to alight but the ship was rolling heavily'. That night *Dianthus* shipped a heavy sea which knocked open a door and nearly washed Longbottom out of his hammock. The following day he spotted a migrant Turtle Dove, *Turtur communis* - now classified as *Streptopelia turtur*. He also reported regular sightings off the Algerian coast of a species of hawk with 'general olive or golden brown colour above'. Could these have been Eleanor's Falcon, *Falco eleonora*, which is recorded as breeding on islands off this coast? RNBWS records include one from this author of such a falcon which established itself onboard off the Moroccan coast and spattered the bridge wings with the blood of its meal of Storm-petrels.

The Swifts and Swallows 'were still dashing along the narrow white walled streets' of Bizerte during his first visit, and, as night fell, owls 'silently glided around the tiny squares or swung away over the red roofs'. He noted that by the end of October the Swifts and Swallows had virtually vanished, indicating that they do not linger long in Northern Africa. On passage off the same coast on Armistice Day he recorded 'a few small land birds apparently still on migration', and 'a battered Craking Heron brownish in colour and presumably moulting for it had gaps in its wings and tail which gave it a very tattered and ragged look'. The following day a V-shaped formation of 40 to 50 of 'these large Heron-like birds' passed overhead. Later, ashore in Port Said, he saw similar formations, one 'a double-V' of at least 200 birds, and now surmised that they were 'possibly Storks or Cranes'. The Crane, *Grus grus*, seems more likely. In Port Said on 24 November he saw a small batch of swallows, presumably *Hirundo rustica*, since Longbottom seems likely to have spotted the distinctive mark of the Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica*. A possible Little Owl, *Athene noctua* flew around the ship.



Plate 8. HMS *Dianthus*
- the crow's-nest from which
Maurice Longbottom made many
of his observations can be seen
clearly. © Public Domain

On the return passage to Malta an owl rather larger in size than a Tawny Owl circled the starboard quarter. Longbottom never managed to identify it but recorded mottled-brown upperparts and almost white under-wing surfaces with a conspicuous black patch. This seems likely to have been a Short-Eared Owl, *Asio flammeus*, which is reported as quite frequently sighted during seawatching at Malta.⁴ Ashore in the island he was struck by the absence of birdlife during his forays into the countryside. He mentions only a solitary Robin, 'the Continental Redbreast', *Erithacus rubecula*, in the gardens of the Governor's country residence at Saint Antonio. It is recorded locally as a late autumn migrant and wintering species.

Constrained I suspect by the attention span of even an interested audience, Longbottom brought his talk to rather an abrupt end in Mudros Harbour, 'noting for the last time the Yellow-legged Herring Gull, the Lesser Black-backed Gull and the Black-headed Gull, also a few ducks and cormorants'.

Postscript

After demobilisation Maurice Longbottom returned to the engineering works. He enrolled for night classes that were organised by the Workers' Educational Association and taught by lecturers from Leeds University. He specialised in Biology and Botany, and his curiosity and capacity for quick learning are apparent in his account of his Mediterranean experiences. He trained to be a lecturer, illustrating his talks with a projector to display his own photographs. In 1931 he started part-time work as an assistant curator at Cartwright Hall in Bradford whilst studying for a museum diploma, and he was one of the first seven in the country to be awarded. He became the curator of Keighley Museum in 1939 and played a leading role in preparing the current venue at Cliffe Castle. Sadly, he did not live to see it open to the public. He died of pancreatic cancer in 1946, aged 48.

It has been a particular pleasure for me to compose this record and preserve the memory of a young man from an unprivileged background who made the most of every opportunity, including his war service. He was a very worthy Royal Naval Birdwatcher.

Michael Barritt

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⁴ https://www.birdinginmalta.com/species_shorteared.html [accessed January 2022].

Simmer Dim 2021 - THE RAFOS/RNBWS/AOS expedition to north Mainland Shetland, June 2021

by Group Captain Keith Cowieson,
RAFOS Field Activities Liaison Officer and RNBWS member
(Photographs by the author except where indicated).

Introduction

This article is the final report foreshadowed by Stephen Chapman in his short preliminary piece in *Sea Swallow* 70.

As a follow up to the RAFOS-led successful 2019 Shetland outing in support of JNCC's Seabirds Count (Cowieson, 2019), Daisy Burnell, the overall JNCC Seabirds Count coordinator, and Will Miles, the Regional Coordinator for the Shetland Isles and the Seabird Group's Seabird Census member, requested we reprise our efforts in 2021, with the aim of visiting as many of the unsurveyed grid squares in the parishes of Delting, Lunnasting, Nesting, and Northmavine in north Mainland Shetland as possible. We had made an excellent start in this remote and sparsely-populated area of peatlands in 2019, surveying some 149 grid squares, and this last push would help fill in many of the holes in coverage. The daunting challenge this year was not only the physical effort of tramping over the peat bog and peat hag-dominated landscapes, but also the precautions required to ensure the expedition complied in all respects with the prevailing COVID-19 guidance. In this latter respect Scottish Governmental guidance for carrying out fieldwork under the 'voluntary or charitable activities' exemptions, and its recommended JNCC & BTO procedures for volunteers, proved invaluable.

This year we deployed a 12-strong joint RAFOS, RNBWS and AOS team to carry out the survey, arriving in Lerwick from Aberdeen in mid-June, suitably jabbed, masked, booted and spurred. Our task in this last season of the Seabirds Count was to mop up uncovered inland grid squares, again concentrating on inland breeding skua and gulls. Half of the team members were already familiar with survey methodology, predominant topography and habitat from 2018 and 2019, so we were able to hit the ground running and conduct on-the-job training/mentoring for our new volunteer surveyors where required.

Seabird count priorities

The priority for our Seabirds Count work on Mainland Shetland remained squarely focused on skua and inland gull colonies, as some of these species are those giving rise to great conservation concern. The Seabird Monitoring Programme (SMP) Report 1986–2019 (JNCC 2021) records that Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* numbers have declined by 70% since Seabird 2000 to around 785 breeding pairs (Woodward *et al.*, 2020) - the greatest decline of any UK breeding seabird over the period. Conversely, Great Skua *Stercorarius skua* had prospered, increasing by 18% since Seabird 2000 (JNCC 2018). Again, we looked forward to discovering the level of changes between Seabird 2000 observations and our own.



Plate 9. Bonxie (The local Northern Isles name for Great Skua) nest & eggs with Sullom Voe Oil & Gas Terminal in the background.

The task

So, what did we achieve during our survey and what lessons were we able to identify for future breeding seabird surveyors? The task was simple: walk as many of the remote, nominated grid squares visited during Seabird 2000 as time, weather and resources permitted, and conduct a snap-shot, single-visit survey. Our aggregated 2019 and 2021 observations are tabulated below, alongside Seabird 2000 results:

Table 1. Changes in inland breeding seabird populations on north Mainland Shetland (from 347 Grid Squares surveyed), 2000 v 2019 & 2021. (Health warning - 2019 & 2021 figures not yet checked by JNCC)

Species	Seabird 2000	Seabirds Count (2019 & 2021)	% Change
Arctic Skua	47 AOT	28 AOT	-40
Great Skua	116 AOT	196 AOT	+69
Great Black-backed Gull	61 AOT	93 AON/AOT	+52
Lesser Black-backed Gull	0	2 AOT	N/A
Herring Gull	6 AOT	50 AOT	+733
Common Gull	95 AOT	295 AON/AOT	+211
Black-headed Gull	21 AOT	34 AON/AOT	+62
Arctic Tern	0	632 AON/AOT	N/A

Source: Seabird Monitoring Programme On-line Database <https://app.bto.org/seabirds/public/index.jsp>



Inland gulls

Inland breeding gulls on north Mainland Shetland appear to be doing well. Although relatively thin on the ground on the peatlands, many higher, drier, ridges boasted at least one pair of Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus*, often several in loose groupings - and they were the only gulls found close to breeding Great Skua, being quite capable of holding their own with such aggressive, predatory neighbours. Meanwhile Common Gulls *Larus canus* appear to be doing particularly well, certainly living up to their name in north Mainland Shetland, more than doubling in number since Seabird 2000, with many lochs, dubh-lochans and pools hosting small colonies.

Plate 10. Great Black-backed Gull chicks.



Plate 11. Common Gull incubating on stone-filled, sea-defence wire basket, Sullom Voe. © *Martin Alabaster*

Skuas

Our skua observations from the 347 grid squares surveyed again mirrored the recent SMP trends, if not the modest scale of the national Great Skua increase. Arctic skua numbers were down 60% over the period from 47 to 28 Apparently Occupied Territories (AOT), while Great Skua numbers had increased by an impressive 69% from 116 to 196 AOTs.

Changes in skua populations on north Mainland Shetland, 2000 v 2019 & 21

Where Great Skuas bred in the greatest density, Arctic Skuas were absent, and although no 'top down' intra-guild predation by Great Skua of Arctic Skuas, eggs or chicks was observed, the pressure of the burgeoning population of competing/predatory Great Skua does conform to the broad thrust of the 'combined bottom-up / top-down pressures' effect judged to have led to catastrophic Arctic skua declines in Scotland (Perkins *et al.*, 2018). Additionally, the timing of our survey in 2021 was such that most skua pairs had either just hatched or were on the cusp of hatching, so we did not witness any of the distressing high level of bonxie chick and adult mortality, possibly from an unidentified strain of bird flu, reported later in the season from Fair Isle, Foula, Unst and elsewhere in Shetland (Pennington, 2021).



Plate 12. Bonxie nest, hatching egg and chick with egg tooth.



Plate 13. Arctic Skua nest, egg and chick with egg tooth.

This year, many of our designated grid squares were on ridges paralleling the numerous voes (the local name for inlets in the Shetland Isles) that cut into the heavily indented northern coastline. On the peatlands atop these ridges, pairs of Great Skua were spaced every 500–900 m, and not below in the boggy flats and valleys that held the occasional pair of Arctic Skua. On one particular western morainic flat in more glaciated terrain, a small colony of five pairs of bonxies was found within a 300 m² area, with a nesting pair of Arctic Skua within 250 m, located typically in a boggy area by a run-off burn. This was the densest concentration of breeding skua encountered.

Lessons learned

Three years of breeding seabird surveys, concentrating on priority breeding skuas, inland nesting gulls and terns, have reinforced the lessons identified on Orkney and Shetland in previous years, namely that transect walking and flush counting are the two most accurate and effective methods of surveying - as laid out in the 'Seabird monitoring handbook for Britain and Ireland' (Walsh *et al.*, 1995) and 'Bird Census Techniques, 2nd Edition' (Bibby *et al.*, 1992).

Sadly, Arctic Skua territories were few and far between and, as witnessed in 2019, easily overlooked, as the birds are relatively undemonstrative, unless surveyors were heading directly towards nest, eggs or chicks. This reinforces our impression that Arctic Skua numbers in such habitat are highly likely to be under-recorded. Breeding Arctic Skua pairs often only became obvious when surveyors were bearing down on them, often within 30 metres or so, despite having scoped or glassed the area at regular intervals on the approach.



Plate 14. Typical north Mainland Shetland peat hag and moorland terrain (with Sullom Voe Terminal and Ronas Hill in the background).

In stark contrast, the behaviour of their larger Great Skua cousins was much more obvious with off-the-nest birds flying out to inspect approaching surveyors at ranges of 2–300 metres, often revealing previously unnoticed birds and territories. In this respect our findings mirror those of previous years - transect walking is the only sure way of surveying the bulk of breeding skua territories in rolling peatland landscapes, and even then a proportion of Arctic Skua pairs is inevitably going to be overlooked. In north Mainland Shetland, the peat hag-dominated landscape essentially rendered any attempt at accurately surveying skuas from vantage points redundant, due to the significant areas of dead ground hidden by folds and dips in the undulating landscape.

Top tips for surveyors

Aggressive nest defence by skuas, gulls and terns is intimidating for experienced and novice breeding seabird surveyors alike. Although it is unusual to be physically struck, it is nevertheless an unnerving experience for many, and some recommend not only wearing stout headgear but also holding a walking pole or suchlike above head-height, as birds invariably attack the highest point of the intruder. Over the years I have found that facing attacking birds, and looking them directly in the eye will invariably cause them to veer away or pull up short. Conversely, turning one's back on the birds can lead to being hit, occasionally - and I have had the odd 'bump' to prove it.



Plate 15. The author attracting close Bonxie attention, indicative of nearby nest, eggs or young. © Martin Alabaster

Another observation is that the ferocity of the mobbing attack, and the closeness of the pass, can often be another cue to the proximity of nest or chicks. The closer and more frequent the attacks from bonxie, the 'hotter' the surveyor is. With Arctic Skua, the risk of being hit is much less, but a good giveaway to proximity to nest or chicks is the extent to which the 'skootie alan' (the local name for Arctic Skua) flutter closer and closer around one's head, or perform a 'dying duck' distraction display around one's feet. Again, the closer and more frequent, the closer the surveyor is. My recommendations to fellow breeding seabird surveyors then are to face attacking seabirds directly if possible, and look them straight in the eye as you make your way gingerly through tern, gull and skua colonies. The more demonstrative they become, the closer to nest and/or chicks you are. That said, clearly one should not linger in the vicinity when the birds are distressed, only remaining long enough to record the nest or ring the young, particularly if the weather is cold, windy or wet.



Plate 16. Dark phase Arctic Skua distraction display.

Finally, vivid patches of well-manured, green plots in otherwise uniform brown peat and heathland-dominated landscapes are another good giveaway for locating Great Skua (and Great Black-backed Gull) territories and nest sites. These invariably indicate historical breeding sites and lookout posts, well-fertilised by guano and the decomposing corpses of prey over the years.

Seabird nest incorporation of debris

In 2018, Dr Nina O’Hanlon of the University of the Highlands and Islands requested that surveyors note any seabird nest incorporation of plastic during their work, in order that the proportion of nests affected could be ascertained. This innovative and worthy topical initiative grew like topsy and proved very successful, spawning a website of its own, not only cataloguing plastic incorporation in seabird nests, but also the presence of other debris in all bird species’ nests, worldwide (Birds & Debris, 2021). Moreover, researchers have found that such opportunistic data collection of nest incorporation of debris by seabirds is a cost-effective way of detecting changes in the prevalence of debris in the marine environment across a large geographic range (O’Hanlon *et al.*, 2021). On Mainland Shetland, we found that many shorelines on both survey areas contained varying amounts of plastic and other litter - noticeably worse by fish and shellfish farms - and several Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* nests were discovered this year in wrack and flotsam-littered shingle beaches, containing thread-like plastic, plastic rope, metal wire and other debris. The terns’ nests were part of a small colony of 12 pairs, sadly surrounded by, and interspersed with, the detritus of fish farm and other activity.



Plate 17a–b. Arctic Tern nests amongst the plastic rope, thread and other plastic. © Brian Lyon
Plate 18. Arctic Tern colony's plastic-littered, shingle-beach habitat.



Plate 19. Common Crossbill. © Photographer

Non-target bird species and other wildlife

Shetland's appeal is not limited to seabirds, for there were good numbers of wetland birds and waterfowl in the survey area, such as Eider *Somateria mollissima*, Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Teal *Anas crecca*, breeding wild Greylag Goose *Anser anser*, Wigeon *Anas penelope*, locally common Red-throated Diver *Gavia stellata* and a pair of breeding Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. Resident breeding raptors were scarce, although we were fortunate to come across two pairs of breeding Merlin *Falco columbarius*. Breeding waders however abounded, including Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria*, Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Oystercatcher *Haemotopus ostralegus*, Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, Snipe *Gallinago gallinago* and numerous Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*. Passerines and doves included Blackbird *Turdus merula*, Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Meadow and Rock Pipit *Anthus pratensis* and *A. petrosus*, Raven *Corvus corax*, Rock Dove *Columba livia*, Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*, Woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and Crossbill *Loxia curvirostris*, as well as several pairs of Red Grouse *Lagopus scotica*. Notwithstanding the recent reported declines in some populations of breeding birds in Shetland (Hughes *et al.*, 2021), for those accustomed to declining mainland UK populations, Shetland offers an impressive and diverse assemblage of birds with waders especially abundant, perhaps reflecting the reduction in native mammalian predators on the islands. Added wildlife bonuses included an Otter *Lutra lutra* frequenting the bottom of the garden by our accommodation and a surprisingly good sprinkling of Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* in our survey areas.



Plate 20. Mountain Hare leveret.



Plate 21. Otter with prey in the garden.

Conclusions

In total, 198 SMP Grid Squares were surveyed by the RAFOS, RNBWS and AOS team in 2021 making a total of 347 SMP grid squares covered in two seasons of work on north Mainland Shetland. The sites ranged in character from 300ft vertical cliffs, through tundra-like heather moorland and peat hags and bog, to stretches of sandy and shingle beaches. In 2021 we covered between 5–11 miles on foot every day, often over demanding and unforgiving terrain and in all weathers. In addition, the teams completed 32 species lists for BTO's BirdTrack from 13 separate 10 Km squares. A total of 591 BirdTrack records were created in the survey areas with 73 species recorded. In addition, 15 Whimbrel priority squares were surveyed and 17 Whimbrel breeding records and other opportunistic Whimbrel sightings were passed to the National Whimbrel Survey 2021 coordinator.



Plate 22. Whimbrel 'trilling'.

Additionally, several nest record cards covering a variety of species were also generated for the BTO Nest Record Scheme; five Nest Incorporation of Debris records were posted on the Birds & Debris website (four Arctic Tern, one Raven); eight Flower Insect Timed (FIT) count records were submitted to the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology FIT database; and several moth records were forwarded to the Shetland Natural Heritage Project Officer.

Finally, the RAFOS Chairman and Committee would like to express their sincere gratitude to both the Seabird Group and RNBWS for their generous grants towards the costs of our 2021 and previous expeditions. All participants have found the experience of tremendous value and benefit and learnt significant new skills in the process. We are now all looking forward, rather wistfully and longingly, to the 5th National Periodic Census of Breeding Seabirds in the UK and Ireland - in 2030 or so? - and to reading the results of Seabirds Count findings in Daisy *et al.*'s forthcoming tome.

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Plate 23. The SIMMER DIM 21 team. © Martin Alabaster

Involvement of the Zino family in nature conservation in the Selvagen Islands

by David Dobson

(Photos by F Zino, except where indicated)

Introduction

Readers of *Sea Swallow* will be familiar with the work of Frank Zino (FZ) and his father Alec (PAZ) in Madeira, notably in the discovery and conservation of the endangered Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* (where the latest state of play can be found on pages 34–37). This article deals with another longstanding endeavour by the Zino family, that of their involvement in nature conservation in the Selvagen Islands. It is a story that goes back over sixty years, and every visit to the islands has been meticulously recorded by Frank and his father.

The sub-archipelago of the Selvagens is the southernmost part of the Portuguese territories. There are three main islands - Selvagem Grande (2,45 km², 151 m high), Selvagem Pequena (0.16 km², low lying) and Ilhéu de Fora (0.071 km², low lying). All arid, they lie between Madeira and the Canaries and come under the Autonomous Region of Madeira.

It is thought that the islands were first discovered and claimed for Portugal by the fleet of Henry the Navigator, though they appear on a map dated 1375. Early explorers left rabbits and goats as was the habit in those days. The last goat disappeared from Selvagem Grande in about 1900, and rabbits and mice were removed in a very successful eradication scheme in 2002/3.



Figure 1. The Selvagen Islands. © Google Earth

Human exploitation of the islands' resources

Whilst there are records of the exploitation of the islands' resources since the 16th century, there has never been a resident human population there, though fishermen and collectors of seabirds often stayed for extended periods. The lichen *Rocella tinctoria* was collected to produce a royal purple dye, said to have been used in the Vatican, while the shrub *Mysembryanthemum crystallinum* was baked to produce soda. More importantly, every year the juvenile Cory's Shearwaters *Calonectris diomedea* were taken from their nests. Their down and feathers went to the English market to make pillows and eiderdowns; their bodies were salted and sold in Madeira, while the entrails heads and feet were ground up to make ground bait. So, nothing was wasted.

Early involvement of the Zino family

In 1957 PAZ and Günther Maul (Gerry), head of the Funchal Natural History Museum, spent three weeks on Selvagem Pequena. This they found to be occupied by Spanish fishermen and their families - illegally of course, but there was no control by the authorities.

During this visit the two men decided that it was important to have a proper scientific expedition to the islands, and this finally took place in 1963, organised by the Funchal Natural History Museum. PAZ and his son Frank were part of that expedition, there to provide general support to the scientists, and with the specific task of catching enough food to feed 26 people for two meals a day!

They got on particularly well with Christian Jouanin and Francis Roux of the Paris Natural History Museum and this excited their ornithological interest. A firm friendship then began, which resulted in yearly visits to all the islands of the Madeira Archipelago, but with a special interest in the Selvagens. However, getting to these islands was always difficult, usually achieved by hiring boats from Madeira. Occasionally PAZ's yacht *Yam Seng* was used, but the anchorage off Selvagem Grande is not safe, and this made for a very unrelaxed visit.



Plate 24. The first expedition; lunch on board the base vessel *Persistencia* at anchor off Selvagem Grande.



Plate 25. PAZ and FZ walking on Selvagem Grande, 1988.



Plate 26. Sunset, Selvagem Grande.

The next important step was in 1967, when PAZ went down to the Selvagem Grande, together with son Frank and daughter Alexandra, with one of the owners of the culling rights as their pilot. There they met the other owners of the culling rights to the islands - rights that lasted for three-year periods, with 1967 the next renewal date.

Going round the island, the Zinos and the culling rights owners noted that many of the young Cory's had been taken. This was the period in which many of the fishing boats in Madeira had become motorised and were much larger than before, giving them greater autonomy. This meant that they were now able to visit the Selvagens on a regular basis, and sadly they took both young and old birds indiscriminately. As a result, the population was much depleted.

There was much discussion in the evenings about this, and the upshot was that the owners of the culling rights decided that they would carry out the 1967 cull and then give up their rights. PAZ asked if they would mind if he took these over, with the object of stopping all culling of the islands' seabirds. There was no objection, and the family set about finding a suitable place to build a house to act as back up for bird work.

On the family's return to Funchal on 6 September PAZ's wife Yvonne, a great behind the scenes organiser, designed a house. Various permissions and contracts were signed, and on 14 September the coastal vessel *Milano* set off for the Selvagens with not only the personnel to carry out the final cull of the juvenile Cory's but also the workmen and material to start building the house. These workers returned to Funchal in November, with the house almost complete, and in the following April they went down again to finish the job.

By 1971 study rectangles had been set up on the island, and PAZ's first paper on the breeding of Cory's Shearwater on Selvagem Grande was published in *IBIS*. (*Vol 113(2) 212-217*). However, running a private nature reserve, with wardens, was proving to be very expensive, and PAZ and Christian Jouanin had long talks about the future of the islands. Christian was on the board of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and after discussions in Geneva with Hoffman la Roche and Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, who were the two Presidents, it was agreed that the WWF would try to buy the islands in order to set up an official nature reserve. The WWF then gave PAZ power of attorney to try and bring it about.

A very favourable deal was then negotiated by PAZ, but for reasons never explained there were complications with the banks, which delayed proceedings. Then came a PR disaster. A Lisbon newspaper, which obviously had no knowledge of what the WWF might be, published an article saying that PAZ was organising the sale of the Selvagens with the aim of setting up a Russian submarine base!

At this point the Lisbon government lost its nerve and decided to exercise its option to buy the islands. This it did in 1971, declaring them a Total Natural Reserve - the first in Portugal. It then sat back and did nothing; the islands were abandoned, and with no wardens the illegal killing soon resumed.

In 1974 there was a revolution in Portugal, and in 1976 some fishermen, inspired by the military coup and general lawlessness, sought revenge for the loss of their culling rights in the Selvagens by going there and slaughtering almost every bird they could find, and stripping the Zino house to bare walls. When PAZ discovered this he asked RTP, the Portuguese television channel, to film the carnage. The cameramen found a total of just four young Cory's on the whole island, with piles of dead birds lying everywhere, and this film created such a shock in Lisbon that the Central Government was forced to act. They decided to pay for wardens, and build a house for them, though in fact it was PAZ who had to find them, and pay for them, while awaiting funds from Lisbon. His burdens eased only when the Parque Natural da Madeira was established in 1982. Manuel Biscoito, from the Natural History Museum, was a great help.

In 1979 FZ, having trained as a doctor and practised in England as a GP and in Occupational Health at the BBC Television Centre, moved with his family back to Madeira, and this led to more regular visits to the Selvagens, and a steady programme of research and conservation. Travel to the islands was by now courtesy of the Portuguese Navy, equipped at the time with old flat-bottomed river craft from the former African colonies, and totally unsuitable for the open ocean. These vessels were extremely uncomfortable but nevertheless did a wonderful job until they were well over 40 years old. The Portuguese Government then bought second hand Danish vessels, which while effective in calm waters are still not really suited for the Atlantic - and they too are now old.

In the years that followed, research continued, often in conjunction with Jouanin and Roux, and mainly on the Cory's which was the species most amenable to study because the terrain and nests of the other species in unstable sandy substrates make population monitoring difficult. The Cory's Shearwaters, on the other hand, build nests in accessible areas and are amenable to handling during laying and incubation without the risk of nest desertion.

A big leap forward

Selvagen Grande had long harboured populations of two alien invasive mammals, the House Mouse *Mus musculus* and the European Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, and a successful campaign of eradication was conducted against these two species in the latter part of 2002 and early 2003. Preliminary studies documented the likely beneficial effect of this action on invertebrate and plant communities, and on populations of Berthelot's Pipit *Anthus berthelotti berthelotti* and two reptiles. However, the most important objective of the eradication programme was the protection of five pelagic seabirds, and



Plate 27. Berthelot's Pipit.

the positive effect on them was almost immediate. A provisional report was published in 2008, and in 2021, nineteen years after the eradication, a full report was published in *Oryx* (see *Sea Swallow* 70:34).

Distractions

Over the decades there were many diversions from the work of research - some welcome, some not. Two shipwrecks on the islands came into the latter category, as did several visits by demanding yachtsmen, but there were many on the positive side too. All the Presidents of Portugal since Mario Soares have visited the islands over the years, and in 1985 the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, with Prince Philip on board, returning to the UK from West Africa on WWF business, paid a short visit. This was a very



Plate 28. 25th anniversary of the 1963 expedition; four members of that expedition and three generations of Zinos. (L-R) Christian Jouanin, PAZ, FZ, EAZ (Buffy, front), Francesca Zino, Alex Zino, Francis Roux.

happy and informal occasion and ended with FZ and wife Buffy (EAZ) taking passage in *Britannia* to Funchal.

An equally memorable event came in 1988, on the 25th anniversary of the first scientific expedition to the Selvagens, with a gathering on Selvagem Grande of four members of the original expedition and three generations of Zinos. A very special occasion.

The passing of the baton

Alec Zino was to make just one more visit to the Selvagens, and though he remained benignly and nominally in control for most of the rest of his life, gradually Frank took over responsibility; it worked well, for the two had always got on very harmoniously. Alec finally died in March 2004, aged 88, when, as *The Times* proclaimed, “Madeira wildlife lost its greatest champion”. His natural history interests had covered all species, from birds and butterflies to seals; all this while he ran the family firm, which he eventually handed over to his son Michael. In the 1950s he also set up a foundation which still provides education and care for disadvantaged children.

As a result of his conservation work, Alec was made a *Commendador da Ordem do Infante Dom Henrique*, the Portuguese equivalent of the OBE, in 1990. He was also awarded a Certificate of Merit from the UK Minister of Agriculture in 1988.

The situation today, and prospects for the future

The Selvagens have changed dramatically since PAZ’s first visit in 1957, when there was almost nothing there. Since then, and largely as the result of the drive of the Zino family, the authorities have installed two lighthouses, built a house for the wardens, and in more recent times installed a naval police station. There is now a permanent population of two wardens, two naval police and one Portuguese Navy representative, and these have radio, television, a fixed telephone line, internet access, and a post office - each presented with due ceremony during various high profile Presidential visits.



Plate 29. Visit of the President of Portugal.



Plate 30. HMS *Britannia* off Selvagem Grande.



Plate 31. An unwelcome visitor.



Plate 32. Selvagem Grande in torrential rain, with the Zino house in the background. This often happens in October; hell for the nests and young Cory's.

All these developments have of course been on Selvagem Grande, but the other two main islands remain scientifically important, because they have over the ages developed their own endemic species and must therefore surely be ripe for investigation. Selvagem Pequena was wardened for a short while but is now fitted with surveillance cameras connected to the police station, while Ilhéu de Fora remains untouched, and very difficult to access. In 2021 the government increased the area of total reserve to 12 miles round the islands, making it the largest marine reserve in Europe.

As for the Zino family house, that remains - it was well designed, and built to last - and it is important, not just to the family but for political reasons too. This is because Spain and Portugal have been at loggerheads for some time over the Selvagens. Spain accepts that the islands belong to Portugal but insists that they are rocks and not islands. Basically, this is an argument about the seabed and what it might contain, because rocks have only a 12 mile economic zone and if they were declared as such Portugal would lose hundreds of square miles of sea bed. The presence for over fifty years on Selvagem Grande of a private house, which pays land tax, is therefore a crucial factor in the dispute with the Spaniards. As to the future, the hope is that the Funchal Museum will use the house for scientific studies and pay for its maintenance and be obliged to continue such work as the continued monitoring of the Cory study areas which have been in operation since 1971.

In physical terms therefore, the islands are now well protected and patrolled by the Portuguese navy, though there is plenty more that needs to be done. Living conditions for those ashore need to be improved; more solar panels are needed to power the desalination of water, currently carried out using a generator. Transport remains a problem, for Portugal, with the largest maritime economic zone of any European nation, just does not have enough ships, and this affects the rotation of staff on the island. Hopefully investment in new naval craft will happen in the near future.

As far as nature conservation is concerned, that too is a story of good progress. Birds, especially seabirds, are now protected, they are thriving, and they are being regularly monitored, with scientists, mostly from Portugal, but some from as far away as New Zealand now making regular visits and studies. Another mark of progress is that the two wardens now have some training in conservation, and have fixed duties such as seagull and Berthelot's Pipit counts. They also assist visiting scientists, and in FZ's absence they have also checked nests for him.

The ruling body for the Islands reserve these days is the IFCN (Instituto das Florestas e Conservação da Natureza), and both Frank and his friend and colleague Manuel Biscoito are on the managing committee.

As to future involvement of the Zino family, and my suggestion that one day that will come to an end, I let Frank speak for himself.

"I sincerely hope not. The original member of the family whose dream came true (PAZ) has gone. FZ can see the finishing line, but there is still a bit of kick in the old fellow! Daughter Francesca, who does environmental impact studies will take over and is a great fan and lover of the islands. She fully understands the impacts certain decisions could have on the islands and is a punchy enough character to have her say. Her brother Alexander, also a Selvagens fan, will give her all assistance necessary". Long may that be so!

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Appendix 1. Seabirds of the Selvagen Islands.

There are five, and almost certainly six, breeding seabirds on the Selvagens.

Cory's Shearwater

Selvagem Grande contains the largest Cory's colony in the world, with a total population now of over 30,000 breeding pairs, the biggest factors in this success story being the banning of the slaughter of young birds, and the successful removal of rabbits and mice in 2002/3. It is the only place in the world where these birds come to land in daylight, and they produce a wonderful sight as evening falls. Birds start to return to the island in early February, with numbers increasing through to March. Mating occurs mainly in April, and egg-laying during late May to mid-June. Incubation of the single egg takes 54 days and eggs hatch in mid-July to early August. Parent birds then remain at the nest for three to four days, and thereafter leave the chicks at risk of predation by the Madeiran wall lizard *Teira dugesii selvagensis*, Yellow-legged Gull *Larus michahellis* and, formerly, house mice *Mus musculus*. Parents then make long journeys, as far as the coast of Mauretania, to obtain food for their young. Chicks reach maximum weight in September, which is when the culling previously occurred, some reaching almost double their adult weight. The chicks fledge in late October, about a hundred days after hatching, and depart for South America or South Africa. They first return some five years later, but they only start breeding at eight years of age, and some as old as thirteen. Interestingly, a huge percentage return to the area in which they were born. These birds are long lived, and there is one breeding bird that FZ ringed as a juvenile in 1985.



Plate 33. Cory's arrival, Selvagem Grande.



Plate 34. Cory's pair on the ground.



Plate 35. Cory's Shearwater. © Steve Copsey



Plate 36. Cory's fighting for a nest site.



Plate 37. Cory's mating.



Plate 38. Cory's feeding young.



Plate 39. Cory's with chick.

Baroli's Shearwater *Puffinus baroli*

This is a beautiful small shearwater, previously known as the Little Madeira Shearwater. Its numbers appear to be on the decline, for no obvious reason, and this bird deserves to be studied in greater depth. It is a winter breeder, but is only migratory within a limited area, as has been shown using dataloggers. One is lucky to see one; they are very nocturnal and call only in total darkness. They have amazing blue feet and fly low over the water with a rapid wingbeat. There are probably some 2,500–3,000 breeding pairs on the islands.

Bullwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*

This is a common totally black petrel. It only comes ashore after dark, but is commonly seen at sea. The return to the islands is about the end of April and egg laying starts at the end of May/beginning of June. The incubation period of the single white egg is some 42 days, and fledging time 62 days. Like most seabirds, they are very territorial, using the same nest year after year and the same couple breeding. FZ was due to start a study in 2022 to see how survival rates have changed since the removal of mice, but a succession of last minute changes to Portuguese Navy sailing dates have made that impossible so far.



Plate 40a–b. Baroli's Shearwater.



Plate 41a–b. Bulwer's Petrel.





Plate 42. Madeiran Storm-petrel.

Madeiran Storm-petrel *Hydrobatus castro*

There are two populations on the Selvagens, summer and winter breeders, though breeding can take place all year round. The winter breeders are marginally bigger than the summer breeders. Datalogger trials indicate that they cross over on their migrations, which begs the question of why they need to migrate. They nest in deep burrows with tiny openings, and so are exceptionally difficult to study. FZ has already provided researchers with a lot of datalogger data for these birds and it is hoped that this will be analysed and a report published before long.

White-faced Storm-petrel *Pelagodroma marina*

There are large colonies on the three main islands, with between 60,000 and 90,000 breeding pairs. There are also a few pairs on the Canaries and a sub-species in the Cape Verde Islands. They nest in a burrow in the sand and are winter breeders, with the young fledging in July and August. They are heavily predated by gulls, which take a large toll on the breeding population, each gull eating up to three *Pelagodroma* a day.



Plate 43. White-faced Storm-petrel.



Plate 44. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.



Plate 45. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel alongside a Madeiran Storm-petrel.

Swinhoe's Storm-petrel *Hydrobatis monorhis*

This is as yet unproven as a breeder, but FZ, having caught a bird in full breeding plumage with a very vascular brood patch in the same pile of stones three years running, is convinced that it is a breeder on the Selvagens. Swinhoe's Storm-petrel is actually a bird from China and Japan and is named after Robert Swinhoe, who was a missionary (and naturalist) in China. FZ has a datalogger on one, and should he be able to recover it that should provide important information.

PS.

I later heard from Frank of a little known story, and that concerned a NATO plan in the late 1960s to use the Selvagens for gunnery bombardment practice during a forthcoming NATO exercise - and a mention in despatches for RNBWS! Frank is pretty sure that it was Rear Admiral Pat Morgan, Flag Officer Royal Yachts and the Captain of Britannia, let the cat out of the bag and "nudged my father into action". Word then went to several influential people, including Bill Bourne, then working for the BTO and already closely involved with RNBWS affairs. He pointed out that the one person who could wield some power in the matter was the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee in Brussels, none other than Admiral Sir Nigel Henderson, President of RNBWS! The Secretary of the International Council for Bird Preservation then wrote to Sir Nigel who replied that he had taken the matter up immediately, "and am happy to be able to tell you that this idea of using these islands as targets for NATO naval bombardment exercises has been abandoned."

Madeira 2022 - RNBWS support for Zino's Petrel conservation

by CPO Mark Cutts

Zino's Petrel *Pterodroma madeira* is a species of Gadfly Petrel that is endemic to the island of Madeira and is widely accepted to be Europe's rarest breeding seabird. For many years the species was believed to be a form of Fea's Petrel *Pterodroma feae*, and as recently as the 1960s was believed to be extinct on Madeira. Around this time Paul Alexander Zino, a businessman and amateur ornithologist, suspected that the species might still be present in the high mountains to be found in the centre of Madeira. He began by playing the call of the Fea's Petrel to the local shepherds and after much searching the bird was rediscovered in 1969 breeding near Pico do Areeiro in 1969.

By the early 1980s regular study of the breeding population was taking place and the first ever Zino's Petrel to be ringed was trapped on the night of 12 June 1986 by the son of Alec Zino, Frank.

The Zino family had long had a connection with Royal Navy and around 2015 it was agreed that members of RNBWS would travel to Madeira to assist Frank in his studies of the petrel - and by the way, it was RNBWS member Bill Bourne who first suggested that this newly rediscovered seabird should be called Zino's Petrel.



Plate 46. The team. Tony Tindale, Roger Dickey, Mark Cutts. © Photographer



Plate 47. Pico do Arieiro. © *Photographer*

Since that first bird back in 1986, Frank has trapped and ringed over 500 birds. The birds are caught on the ridge trail that leads from the Pico do Areeiro to Pico Ruivo, at an altitude of 1,750 m, just above the area where the petrels breed. Frank chose the site after observing the birds cross low over the ridge there and reasoned that this would be an ideal place to erect mist-nets. The perfect conditions are a windless night during the new moons from May to July.

In June 2017 I paid my first visit to Funchal with Jacques Turner-Moss, a fellow ringer, whom I had met whilst he studied conservation at Aberystwyth University. We were instructed to walk to Frank's house and he would then drive us to the information centre located at the head of the trail near the top of the mountain. With the addition of Frank's wife Buffy, the four of us headed upwards in a Land Rover on cobbled roadways as the sun set for the evening. The views were breathtaking as we walked the undulating path for about 1.2 kilometres along narrow ridges, hundreds of metres above the clouds, a path well-trodden by both Frank and Buffy. At the ringing site, Frank instructed where to place the poles and secure the guide lines; all that was left then was to wait for full dark. At 23:05 we heard the mournful wailing call of the first Zino's Petrel. It was on our second night on the mountain that we were lucky enough to trap two birds and get to hold this beautiful and surprisingly sweet-smelling seabird.



Plate 48. The Pico do Aveiro trail. © *Photographer*



Plate 49. The Pico do Arieiro. © *Photographer*

My second visit was two years later and this time I was accompanied by Steve Copsey and Lee Lappin, but bad weather meant that we couldn't set the nets up on the mountain. However, we did take the ferry to Porto Santo and during that trip saw Zino's Petrel at sea for the first time. We also saw a lot of the other endemic wildlife.

Now in 2022 I have just returned from my third visit to the island, this time with Tony Tindale and Roger Dickey of the Army Ornithological Society. Sadly, I have to report another bad year. The winds were once again against us, and we achieved just four nights up on the mountain, nets deployed on only two of them - and not a single bird caught! So the two Zino's Petrels we caught in 2017 are still the only ones that I have ever seen in the hand. This definitely was not for the lack of trying this year; on some nights we drove to the head of the trail only to find the weather too harsh even to venture out. I also write this in the knowledge that soon after we left Madeira the weather changed for the better and Frank trapped and ringed about twenty birds!

However, it was not all bad news, for there was one exciting innovation that we brought to the project; the use of thermal imagers. I had purchased a Pulsar Helion TI last year, primarily for surveying and ringing owls near my home on the Island of Portland in Dorset. Our use of the imager on the mountains of Madeira demonstrated its worth as we witnessed 26 juvenile Petrels flying together over the breeding colony, data that was previously unavailable without the use of this technology.

Finally, many thanks from the visiting team to Frank and Buffy Zino; their enthusiasm for Zino's Petrel is infectious and they were also fantastic hosts on the nights that we couldn't venture above the clouds. Thanks also to Manuel Biscoito for the use of the accommodation at The Marine Biological Station in Funchal.

Mark Cutts

Email: expeditions@rnbws.org.uk



Plate 50. The full team. (L-R) Buffy, Tony, Frank, Mark and Roger. © Tony Tindale

Alaska to Taiwan - from the new World to the old

by Simon Cook

In the autumn of 2015, between the middle of August and late September, I was lucky enough to be employed by Silversea Expeditions on their vessel *MV Silver Discoverer*. From the plane on the way to join the ship I had fine views of Alaska's Mount McKinley and as the aircraft was taxiing to the terminal at Nome it was great to see a welcoming committee of about 20 Musk Ox *Ovibos moschatus*. From Nome, the ship sailed across the Bering Sea to the Provideniya area in Russia, out to the Commander Islands, then to Kamchatka, the northernmost of the Kuril Islands, the Sea of Okhotsk (to avoid an approaching storm), Russia's Sakhalin Island, Japan and the Ryukyu Islands to Taiwan. Because of to Japan's cabotage laws a visit had to be made to South Korea.

Once we left remote Russia seabird numbers and diversity plummeted, but there were nevertheless large numbers of enthralling seabirds and marine mammals to be seen. As usual, lots of time was spent on the lookout and much data was submitted to RNBWS database. The species accounts are divided into two parts - the Bering Sea and Russian waters and then Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. See Appendix 1 for a list of all the voyages.

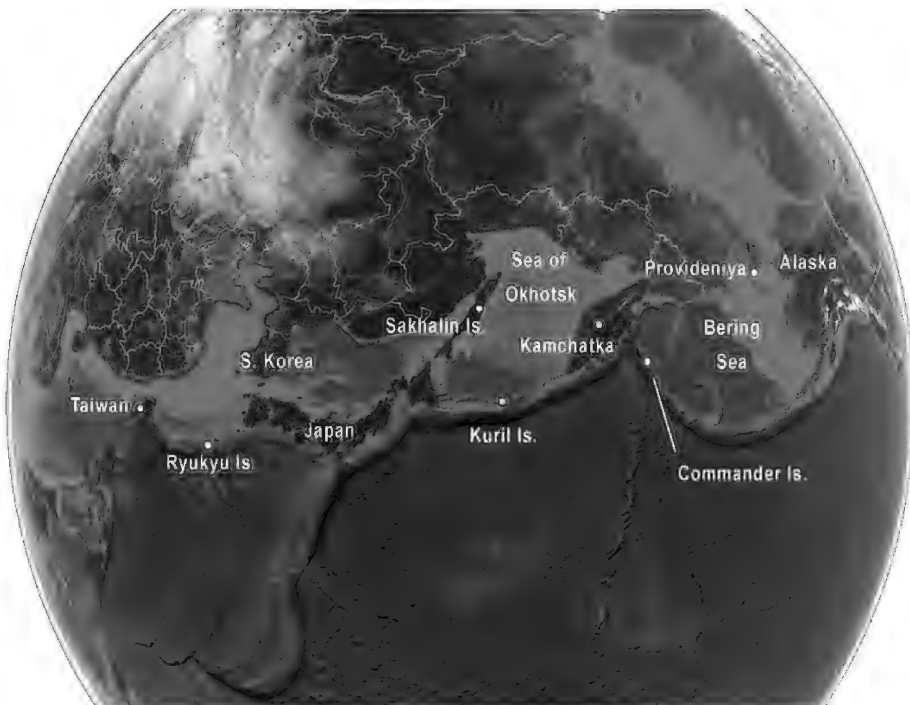


Figure 1. Caption. © Google Earth???



Plate 51. Medny Island. © Photographer

1) Bering Sea & Russian waters - Nome, Alaska to Otaru, (Hokkaido) Japan

All times quoted are local and the latitude and longitude are given for the most interesting sightings. From the ship a total of 39 species of seabird was logged. The largest groups were tubenoses and alcids. Other highlights were many species of marine mammal, including a group of 2–3,000 Walrus *Odobenus rosmarus*, and Brown Bear *Ursus arctos*.

Laysan Albatross *Phoebastria immutabilis*. **21/8** to Bering Island: eight, all going north - one at 11.05 at 56.1N, 166.6E, one at 11.29 at 56.1N, 166.6E; birds astern of the ship at 12.05 & 12.56, two at 13.46 at 55.6N, 166.6E and two at 14.14 at 55.5N, 166.6E - within sight of the island. **22/8** en route from Bering Island: 37. **27/8** Sea of Okhotsk: 16. **28/8** coastal waters: one at 06.00 at 48.4N, 145.2E, one at 18.10 at 47.5N, 144.3E. **30/8** Sea of Japan: one at 09.55 at 43.6N, 141.1E.

Black-footed Albatross *Phoebastria nigripes*. **27/8** Sea of Okhotsk: six between 06.38 (50.1N, 152.5E) and 15.00 (49.5N, 149.9E).

Northern Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*. **15/8** Bering Sea: 264, some at a big jellyfish. **16/8** nearshore waters: 135. **17/8** nearshore waters: 22. **19/8** nearshore waters: 17. **21/8** to Bering Island: 342. **22/8** en route from Bering Island: 200 plus. **23/8** coastal waters: 42. **26/8** coastal waters: 31. **27/8** Sea of Okhotsk: 207. **28/8** coastal waters: c. 250. **30/8** Sea of Japan: two.

Mottled Petrel *Pterodroma inexpectata*. **22/8** en route from Bering Island: five between 12.00 (55.1N, 165.6E) and 15.15 (54.9N, 164.6E), **27/8** Sea of Okhotsk: one at 49.9N, 151.9E.

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardeenna carneipes*. **28/8** coastal waters: one. **29/8** off Korsakov, Sakhalin Island: one. **30/8** Sea of Japan: five.

Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 2,500–3,000. 16/8 inshore waters: 430. 17/8 inshore waters: 617. 19/8 inshore waters: 160. 21/8 to Bering Island: seven. 22/8 en route from Bering Island: 700+, 600+ and c. 150 during three watches. 23/8 coastal waters: 17. 26/8 coastal waters: six, plus several hundred in the Kuril Passage. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: four. 28/8 coastal waters: 36.

Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris*. 15/8 Bering Sea: six. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: two at 50.1N, 152.3E.

Japanese Storm-petrel *Thalobata kumagai*. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: one at 10.31 at 49.8N, 151.3E.

Leach's Storm-petrel *Hydrobates leucorhoa*. 21/8 to Bering Island: one. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: 22, including some on the water.

Fork-tailed Storm-petrel *Hydrobates furcatus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: three, 16/8 inshore waters: two. 19/8 inshore waters: one. 21/8 to Bering Island: nine in the morning and 1,000+ in the afternoon. 22/8 en route from Bering Island: 31. 23/8 coastal waters: one. 26/8 coastal waters: one. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: 103 including groups of 14, 14, 17, 6 and 18 on the water.

Pelagic Cormorant *Phalacrocorax pelagicus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 15. 19/8 inshore waters: two. 22/8 en route from Bering Island: 17.

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: one. 16/8 inshore waters: one. 26/8 coastal waters: 90 at 11.04 and 13 at 11.51 at 51N, 157.1E. 30/8 Sea of Japan: 72 in groups of 8, 28, 12, 7, 9 & 8.

Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 40. 16/8 inshore waters: two. 17/8 inshore waters: nine. 19/8 inshore waters: 20. 21/8 to Bering Island: 800+.

phalarope sp. 19/8 nearshore waters: 135 in groups of 16, 30, 7, 8, 21, 13, & 40. 26/8 coastal waters: c. 135 and c. 70 in the Kuril Passage.

Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*. 28/8 coastal waters: 15 immatures. 29/8 off Korsakov: 30+.



Plate 52. Kamchatka volcano. © Photographer

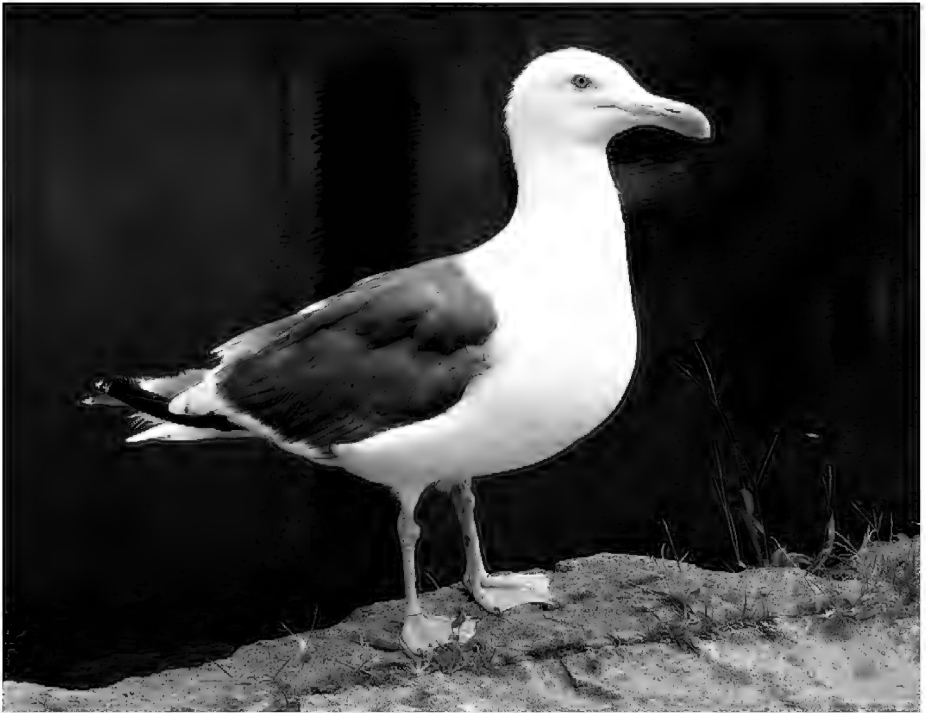


Plate 53. Slaty-backed Gull. © Photographer

- Glaucous-winged Gull** *Larus glaucescens*. 21/8 to Bering Island: one.
Glaucous Gull *Larus hyperboreus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: seven. At Provideniya: one.
Vega Gull *Larus vegae*. 16/8 inshore waters: one adult and one immature on board.
 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: one. 28/8 coastal waters: ten.
Slaty-backed Gull *Larus schistisagus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: one. 17/8 inshore waters: two.
 19/8 inshore waters: 30+ including six on board. 21/8 to Bering Island: one. 22/8 en
 route from Bering Island: two. 26/8 coastal waters: eight including one on board.
 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: three. 30/8 Sea of Japan: one.
Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. 24/8 Petropavlosk-Kamchatskiy:
 hundreds on a warehouse roof, seen from the ship alongside.
Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 159. 16/8 inshore waters:
 220. 17/8 inshore waters: 160. 19/8 inshore waters: c. 300. 21/8 to Bering Island: 12.
 22/8 en route from Bering Island: seven. 23/8 coastal waters: one. 26/8 coastal
 waters: 12. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: six. 28/8 coastal waters: 97.
Red-legged Kittiwake *Rissa brevirostris*. 21/8 to Bering Island: five. 22/8 en route
 from Bering Island: 15 including 13 immatures.
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. 23/8 coastal waters: 20+.
Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*. 16/8 nearshore waters: three.
Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 17. 16/8 inshore waters: 32,
 including a dark-phase bird. 21/8 to Bering Island: three, including one very close
 individual. 22/8 en route from Bering Island: one. 23/8 coastal waters: one. 28/8
 coastal waters: 17. 28/8 coastal waters: 87 adults and immatures. 29/8 off Korsakov: 12.
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. 16/8 inshore waters: two. 19/8 inshore waters:
 two. 28/8 coastal waters: one adult.



Plate 54. Petropavlosk-Kamchatskiy. © Photographer

Long-tailed Skua *Stercorarius longicaudus*. 15/8 Bering Sea: one. 21/8 to Bering Island: three. 23/8 coastal waters: one. 26/8 off Atlasova, northern Kuril Islands: three very close adults, one with a very long tail. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: two immatures at 49.4N, 149.3E - one chased a Fork-tailed Storm-petrel. 28/8 coastal waters: one.

Common Guillemot *Uria aalge*. 15/8 Bering Sea: four. 16/8 nearshore waters: six, plus two adults with chicks. 17/8 nearshore waters: two. 19/8 nearshore waters: 20+. 22/8 en route from Bering Island: two. 28/8 coastal waters: eight.

Brunnich's Guillemot *Uria lomvia*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 98. 17/8 nearshore waters: four. 19/8 inshore waters: one adult with a chick. 22/8 from Bering Island: 142. 26/8 coastal waters: 21.

Horned Puffin *Fratercula corniculata*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 11. 16/8 inshore waters: one. 17/8 inshore waters: 31.

Tufted Puffin *Fratercula cirrhata*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 12. 16/8 nearshore waters: one. 17/8 nearshore waters: 31. 19/8 nearshore waters: 26. 21/8 to Bering Island: 23. 22/8 en route from Bering Island: 140. 23/8 coastal waters: 13. 26/8 coastal waters: 167. 27/8 Sea of Okhotsk: nine.

Rhinoceros Auklet *Cerorhinca monocerata*. 29/8 off Korsakov: one.

Parakeet Auklet *Aethia psittacula*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 16. 19/8 inshore waters: three. 26/8 coastal waters: one.

Least Auklet *Aethia pusilla*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 43. 16/8 nearshore waters: four.

Crested Auklet *Aethia cristatella*. 15/8 Bering Sea: 20,000+. 16/8 inshore waters: five. 19/8 inshore waters: one. 23/8 coastal waters: 669. 26/8 coastal waters: 4,600+ (some were chased by an immature Gyr Falcon *Falco rusticolus*). 28/8 coastal waters: six.



Plate 55. Crested Ibis breeding centre. © Photographer



Plate 56. Steller's Sea Eagle. © Photographer



Plate 57. Tufted Puffin & Black-legged Kittiwake.
© Photographer



Plate 58. Blue Rock Thrush. © Photographer



Plate 59. Siberian Chipmunk. © Photographer



Plate 60. Arctic Ground Squirrel. © Photographer



Plate 61. Horned Puffin. © Photographer

Whiskered Auklet *Aethia pygmaea*. 28/8 coastal waters: five at 48.4N, 145E

Pigeon Guillemot *Cepphus columba*. 15/8 Bering Sea: eight.

Kuril Guillemot *Cepphus snowi*. 26/8 Kuril Passage: one.

Kittlitz's Murrelet *Brachyramphus brevirostris*. 16/8 nearshore waters: 10.

Ancient Murrelet *Synthliboramphus antiquus*. 28/8 coastal waters: two at c. 47.9N, 144.5E.



Plate 62. Kuril Islands volcano. © Photographer



Plate 63. Steller's Sea Lions. © *Photographer*



Plate 64. Steller's Sea Lions. © *Photographer*



Plate 65. Great Egret. © *Photographer*



Plate 66. Little Egret. © *Photographer*

2) Japan, South Korea, Ryukyu Islands & Taiwan

Again, all times quoted are local and the latitude and longitude are given for the most interesting sightings. From the ship a total of 17 species of seabird was logged. A much-anticipated shore excursion was to the forest at the northern end of Okinawa. Unfortunately, a short visit in the heat of the day meant that the Okinawa Rail *Gallirallus okinawae* eluded me. However, I did see various endemic frogs, lizards and a newt, heard Japanese Bush Warbler *Cettia diphone* and the endemic Pryer's Woodpecker *Dendrocopos noguchii*, and saw two stunning black, chestnut and white male Ryukyu Robins *Luscinia komadori*.

Streaked Shearwater *Calonectris leucomelas*. 1/9 off Hokkaido: c. 5,000 including about 200 and 58 on the water. 1/9, Tsugaru Kaikyo (the strait between Hokkaido and Honshu): c. 4,000. 2/9 Aomori Bay, Honshu: six. 3/9 Sea of Japan to Sado Island: 160, 119, 5–600 & c. 300 by a fishing boat. 4/9 Sea of Japan, off Kanazawa: 82. 5/9 Sea of Japan, off Sakaiminato Port: 56. 6/9 approaching South Korea: 89. 15/9 Sea of Japan: c. 4,000. 16/9 Sea of Japan: four. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: 60. 18/9 Ryukyu Islands: 115, 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: 47.

Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacificus*. 18/9 Ryukyu Islands: 10. 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: one. 21/9 to Taiwan: one.

Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes*. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: two - one on a small piece of polystyrene.

Bulwer's Petrel *Bulweria bulwerii*. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: 15 at c. 30.1N, 130.5E. 18/9 Ryukyu Islands: one. 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: two. 21/9 to Taiwan: one. 22/9 approaching Keelung, Taiwan: five.

Leach's Storm-petrel. 3/9 Sea of Japan to Sado Island: one at c. 39N, 138.8E.

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: one going southwest, 15.30–48, at c. 30N, 130.5E. 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: five catching flying fish.

Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: one at 16.20 at 29.9N, 130.3E. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: eight, also catching flying fish. 22/9 approaching Keelung, Taiwan: 34 including two on polystyrene.

Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*. 6/9 approaching South Korea: one. 10/9 Inland Sea, Japan: two.

Temminck's Cormorant *Phalacrocorax capillatus*. 1/9 off Hokkaido: two. 2/9 Aomori Bay, Honshu: two.

Red-necked Phalarope. 1/9 off Hokkaido: four. 3/9 Sea of Japan to Sado Island: 27. 6/9 approaching South Korea: 14. 15/9 Sea of Japan: nine, 22/9 approaching Keelung, Taiwan: 24.

Black-tailed Gull. 1/9 Tsugaru Kaikyo (the strait between Hokkaido and Honshu): 21. 2/9 Aomori Bay, Honshu: 7–800. 4/9 Sea of Japan, off Kanazawa: two. 4/9 Sea of Japan, off Kanazawa: two.

'comic' tern. 6/9 approaching South Korea: 'many'. 10/9 Inland Sea: 60. 15/9 Sea of Japan: 25.

Slaty-backed Gull. 1/9 off Hokkaido: four. Tsugaru Kaikyo (the strait between Hokkaido and Honshu): two.

Black-naped Tern *Sterna sumatrana*. 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: one as the ship approached Hirara Ko Port.

Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*. 6/9 approaching South Korea: one.

Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*. 18/9 Ryukyu Islands: six, including one on a tree trunk close to the ship at 27N, 127.9E. 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: 34.

Common Noddy *Anous stolidus*. 19/9 Ryukyu Islands: 25 including two on polystyrene.

Long-tailed Skua. 17/9 Ryukyu Islands: four.



Plate 67. South Korea shipyard. © Photographer



Plate 68. Bridal couple, Japan. © Photographer



Plate 69. Miyajima Tori, Japan. © Photographer



Plate 70. Japanese Deer. © Photographer



Plate 71. Ryukyu Red Frog. © Photographer



Plate 72. Manicured Japanese garden. © *Photographer*



Plate 73. Welcoming committee, Hiroshima. © Photographer

These voyages provided ample and unrivalled opportunities to sample the exotic and diverse wildlife of maritime eastern Asia. Unforgettable memories were made by the variety of the scenery and of the wildlife, marine mammals, birds ashore, birds aboard and seabirds. Memorable experiences also included thought-provoking visits to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, being greeted by a lady in a welcoming group wearing a sash reading 'Terminal Lady Kobe', being given an origami Crested Ibis, visiting the Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon* breeding centre, playing (or rather banging) the world's biggest drum - 3.8 metres in diameter and 4 metric tons in weight and last but definitely not least, sailing past Tracy Island but no sign of Thunderbirds!

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Simon Cook

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Appendix 1. List of voyages, 2015.

15–30 August

Nome, Alaska - Russia (Provideniya area, Kamchatka, Commander Islands, northern Kuril Islands, Sea of Okhotsk, Korsakov on Sakhalin Island) - Otaru, Hokkaido, Japan, 2,889 nautical miles (nm)

31 August–11 September

Otaru - Pohang & Ulsan ports, South Korea - Kobe, Honshu, Japan, 1,614 nm

11–22 September

Kobe - Ryukyu Islands - Keelung, Taiwan, 1,638 nm.

Editor's comment. The waters of the Bering Sea and Eastern Russia are seldom visited, so detailed reports of the area are particularly interesting. Commander Tony Norris visited in 2004, and his observations on the geography and wildlife are documented in Sea Swallow 65 (2016) 54–64.

Birding while on a short deployment to HMS *Montrose* in the Arabian Sea

by Warrant Officer A Tindale, BSc

(All photos by the author)

Since October 2018 the frigate HMS *Montrose* has been deployed in the Gulf and based in Bahrain. Because she is permanently based overseas she has two crews which rotate every four months, and to keep the ship operationally up to scratch teams from the Flag Officer Sea Training (FOST) visit the ship regularly to check standards and provide training. As a member of one of those teams I found myself flying out from London Heathrow in December 2021 to embark on the ship and provide a two-week training package for the Starboard crew. The journey to Duqm on the Arabian Sea in Oman involved two flights and a six-hour coach trip from the capital Muscat, followed by a night in what is called a Renaissance Village, which provides accommodation and facilities for the hundreds of workers in the area, prior to our planned embarkation the next day. However, a potential COVID-19 case onboard the ship resulted in a second night at the facility while the ship waited for the result of the COVID-19 testing of the entire ship's company, and this proved to be particularly productive from a birding point of view.



Plate 74. Departure.

The highlights from within the accommodation complex and immediate surrounding area of the rest camp were two 'lifers' on day two. The first was in a reed-choked channel beside the main road, and was only heard, but the sounds were unmistakable; at least two Baillon's Crane, singing from either side of the road bridge over the watercourse. The second was a single Red-tailed (Persian) Wheatear perched on a high rocky outcrop above a ravine opposite the main gate. Although a little distant and appearing hazy in the heat this bird showed well. Other notable records included Red-breasted Flycatcher, Isabelline Shrike, Isabelline Wheatear, 11 Pacific Golden Plover, a Desert Wheatear and seven Ruff.



Plate 75. Red-tailed (Persian) Wheatear.



Plate 76. Isabelline Shrike.



Plate 77. Red-breasted Flycatcher.



Plate 78. Isabelline Wheatear.



Plate 79. Desert Wheatear.



Plate 80. Common Myna, Muscat.



Plate 81. Ruff.



Plate 82. Pacific Golden Plover.

The very modest species list was as follows:

Journey out

Brown-necked Raven *Corvus ruficollis* (two beside Route 32 during the coach journey from Muscat Airport)

Day 1. Rest camp

Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* (three)
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*
Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* (in flight)
Indian Silverbill *Euodice malabarica* (three in palm tree)
Isabelline Shrike *Lanius isabellinus*
Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellinus*
(Common) Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* (male)
Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*
Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* (three)
Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (immature)
Feral Pigeon *Columba livia domestica*
White Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
Yellow Wagtail (including Black-headed) *Motacilla flava*

Day 2. Additions

Baillon's Crake *Zapornia pusilla* (at least two calling)
Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochrurus* (female)
Crested Lark *Galerida cristata*
Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (male)
Moorhen *Gallinula tenebrosa* (calling)
Red-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe chrysopygia*
Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* (four)
(European) Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*
Ruff *Philomagnus pugnax* (seven)
Song Thrush *Turdus philomenos*
Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

The eventual confirmation that *Montrose* remained COVID-19 free resulted in the FOST Team checking out of the rest camp the following day after lunch, and the short drive to the port of Duqm resulted in a sighting of a Long-legged Buzzard, and literally hundreds of Lesser Black-backed Gulls standing on the quayside by the ship. The sight of so many gulls in close proximity flying out of the way of the oncoming vehicle was impressive as the driver turned off the perimeter road and headed towards the gangway.

The additions to the trip list from the Port of Duqm were as follows:

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*
Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans*
Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*
Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*
Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* (dozens)
Sooty Gull *Ichthyraetus hemprichii* (dozens)
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* (two)
Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus* (hundreds)

Once at sea I headed up onto the upper deck at every opportunity and that included at dawn each morning, along with those attending early morning circuits before 'call the hands' at 07.00. My pelagic list started immediately with Masked Boobies drifting effortlessly above the fo'c'sle on the lookout for Flying Fish disturbed by the passage of the ship through the water. However, the first species of note was Jouanin's Petrel, a 'lifer' for me, with a single bird recorded shortly after dawn, another at dusk, and at least four the following dawn, shearing close to the ship. These fast-moving birds proved particularly difficult to photograph, given the limitations of a bridge camera, but fortunately, decent images weren't essential to determine their identification because it was the only all-dark petrel that I was likely to encounter in the area. The beaks held at a 45 degree angle were another useful feature.

Shortly after the four Jouanin's Petrels had disappeared I observed a small flock of light grey waders, but frustratingly they were too distant to identify and later spotted another small flock of what I presumed were the same species. I then spotted yet another small flock of grey waders directly ahead on the surface and managed to capture some record shots of what turned out to be Grey Phalarope, a species that winters in the Arabian Sea.

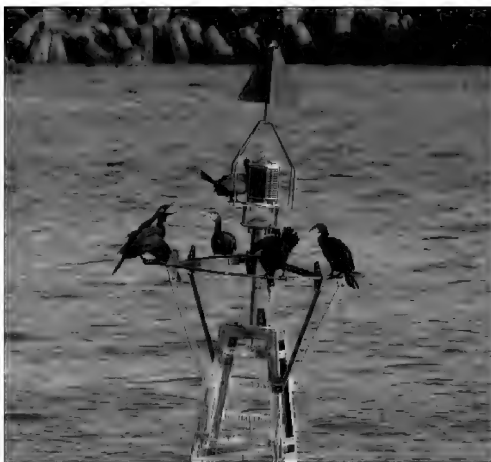


Plate 83. Great Cormorants, Muscat.

On the evening of the 16 December *Montrose* closed the Omani coast and it proved to be rewarding for me despite the rapidly fading light, with Flesh-footed Shearwater, Arctic Skua (two; one dark and one light phase), three Pallas's Gull (another 'lifer'), several Pomarine Skua and a Lesser Crested Tern added to the trip list. The subsequent transit to the Omani capital Muscat proved to be rather uneventful from a birding perspective apart from a distant sighting of a single Persian Shearwater that landed on the sea.



Plate 84. Grey Heron, Muscat.



Plate 85. Masked Booby, Arabian Sea.

Pelagic list

Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*
Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*
Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes* (five)
Grey Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius*
Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*
Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaeetus ichthyaeetus*
Pomarine Skua (3+ and 1) *Stercorarius pomarinus*
Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis*
Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus*

I left HMS *Montrose* in Muscat on 21 Dec 22 but not until after I had had a few sessions of birding from the upper deck. Although unable to go ashore I still managed to add the following species to the trip list during the 24 hours alongside:

Black-headed Gull *Croicocephalus ridibundus* (many)
Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*
House Crow *Corvus splendens*
Slender-billed Gull *Croicocephalus genei*
Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus* (several)
Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* (several)

The last one was a 'lifer' for me, and although it was seen only distantly, it was the only hirundine I was likely to encounter as a resident in the city.

In spite of the restrictions due to COVID-19 it was great to enjoy some foreign birding, my first since the first lockdown. The final tally for my two-week mini deployment to HMS *Montrose* was 50, and that included several unexpected species. I had left the UK hoping for at least one 'lifer', so to connect with five was a real bonus, as was my negative COVID-19 PCR Test after my return to the UK, which enabled me to enjoy Christmas!

Tony Tindale

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2022 Ringing Expedition to Jew's Gate Bird Observatory, Gibraltar, 30 March–9 April

by Lt Col Roger Dickey, Chairman, Army Ornithological Society (AOS)
(Photographs by Mark Cutts except where indicated)

More Bonelli's Warblers *Phylloscopus bonelli* than Blackcaps *Sylvia atricapilla*? We would never have put money on that! Yet they were the second most common catch (33) after Willow Warblers (34) *Phylloscopus trochilus* in what was to be just over a week of testing weather, interspersed with some fabulous species. Blame/credit goes to Mark Cutts for breaking out of the annual autumn pilgrimage to see if we are any better at ageing Blackcaps (27) in the Spring, with the added inducement of a daily raptor count. The combined team of Mark (RNBWS), Verity Hill, Sam Lloyd (both Portland Bird Observatory ringing trainees), Mark Winsloe and Roger Dickey (both of AOS) was a terrific combination of experience and enthusiasm, the latter tested by several days of high winds and rain that prevented both ringing and counts.



A day was lost while having to put up the nets but with three trainees on hand and despite the setback, it all added to the learning experience. And then the birds started to arrive, the first an unexpected Wryneck *Jynx torquilla*; this enigmatic woodpecker always a joy to witness in the hand. The next, a surprising Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator*, the first of six caught throughout the week. Ringing-wise, it was a new bird to all of us and it was easy, in the euphoria of the moment, to forget that its bill is designed to stab and tear. First blood to the shrike and not the last. And the first of many dips into the ringing gospels to check head and nape colour to help differentiate the sexes.

Plate 86. Net 9, looking down on the Bay of Gibraltar.



Plate 87. Bee-eater. © V Hill



Plate 88. Bonelli's Warbler.



Plate 89. Woodchat Shrike.



Plate 90a–b. Hoopoe.



Plate 91a–b. Wryneck. (Plate 91a © V Hill)

Bonelli's Warbler has had a mention but this little bird, disguised amongst the chiffs *Phylloscopus collybita* (17), ibchiffs *P. ibericus* (3) and willows was a treat with its diagnostic greenish-yellow rump and silky white underparts - a reminder to our trainees to check the whole bird as its measurements are very close to those of other *Phyllosc.* The numbers of Subalpine Warblers *Sylvia cantilans* (8) also came as a surprise as these have been rarities in the autumn. The males are striking in colour but the second year and female birds are very similar to several other species of the Mediterranean, and the guides had to come out once more.

Two books have yet to be written: 'Birding in sewage farms', and 'Birding in graveyards'. A report of Hoopoes *Upupa epops* in the runway-side cemetery saw the team walking the length of Gibraltar to find them, discounting on the way (just because we didn't see it), a report of a Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus* in the Alameda Gardens. A joint army/navy flanking action provided at least a chapter for the book, with two hoopoes discovered and several Woodchat Shrikes, with Redstarts *Phoenicurus phoenicurus* also in good numbers. Far from being a bogie bird, four Hoopoes were ringed in total back at the observatory.

Part of the attraction of visiting Gibraltar in the Spring is the raptor watch, and the first clear day with favouring winds put up a count of nearly 1000 Black Kites *Milvus migrans*. Intermixed were Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus*, Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Honey Buzzard *Pernis apivorus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron perconopterus*, Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Goshawk *A. gentilis*, and a variety of falcons. Identification improved exponentially but sadly the inconsistency of the weather played havoc with a sustained count. Nevertheless, Gibraltar lived up to its reputation as one of the best raptor-watching sites in the Mediterranean.

With the general movement of birds across the Strait came the more expected species of migrants, and small nondescript flocks passed almost daily. Hirundine flew close to the observatory, with Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica*, House Martin *Delichon urbicum* and Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* evident. Swifts were difficult to identify until an obvious Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* appeared. The jewels though, were undoubtedly the European Bee-eaters *Merops apiaster*. Mocking the tape-lures, they were caught more by luck than anything else, but what extraordinarily beautiful birds they were. All had been through their post-juvenile moult and were looking stunning. They were also, we realised, a lot larger in the hand than expected.

Just to add variety to our visit, Gibraltar TV recorded our activities and conducted interviews, as part of a general documentary to be shown in September 2022. Members of the team will be keeping to their day jobs.

As always, we are most grateful to the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society for allowing us to stay at Jew's Gate and to ring birds in this very special place.

Roger Dickey

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Report from HMS Enterprise

by Lieutenant M Cavill, RN, Navigating Officer

HMS *Enterprise*, like her sister ship HMS *Echo*, which also features in this Sea Swallow, is a multirole survey ship, first commissioned in 2003. She was on passage through the North Sea in late August 2021 when a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* was spotted on the fo'c'sle. It was observed at times throughout the day as the ship weaved her way south through the various offshore platforms and wind farms of the North Sea. Overnight the bridge team thought that perhaps the bird would be seduced by the bright lights of the offshore platforms, but by morning it was still there, and it then became apparent that there were now not one, but two kestrels on board.



Plate 92a–b. Kestrels onboard. © Photographer

The birds stayed with us for three days, as *Enterprise* moved into the familiar waters of the south coast exercise areas. Here it was normal to see smaller land birds for a few days on board - but not this time; not while these birds of prey were present. Meanwhile, the Kestrels provided fine entertainment, often coming right up to the bridge windows, perching on the port 20 mm gun, and giving the bridge team great views of these beautiful birds.

Matt Cavill

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Plate 93. Kestrels together. © Photographer



Plate 94. My local patch for two weeks. © *Photographer*

Birding on HMS *Prince of Wales* in the North Sea

by Warrant Officer A Tindale, BSc

Following the three-week Basic Sea Training package in June 2021, I found myself back onboard the Royal Navy's high readiness Strike Carrier HMS *Prince of Wales* in September for what was termed Carrier Strike Training. The primary aim of this two-week training period was to qualify F-35 Lightning 2 pilots from RAF Marham to operate at sea both day and night. The second priority was to test the ship routines to ensure that a 24/7 deck cycle could be maintained whilst dealing with internal fires, floods and damage - hence the presence of the Fleet Operational Sea Training contingent that included me.

Operating in the North Sea and with autumn migration already well underway, the potential for recording land birds onboard was much higher than during my previous time on board in early summer. Although I didn't witness a significant fall, I managed to record a total of twelve species of land bird, the most notable being a single Garden Warbler the morning after a rain front had passed through. Unfortunately, I had to travel light and although I took my binoculars, I was unable to take my D-SLR or Bridge camera. Consequently, the image below of the bird perched on the starboard ski ramp nets had to be taken with my phone through my binoculars.



Plate 95. Garden Warbler. © Photographer

Regrettably not all the land migrants observed looked to be capable of continuing their migration following a period of rest onboard. The male Eurasian Siskin hopelessly searching for food on the Pilot Rescue Pod, and a Meadow Pipit that I retrieved from the forward gym on 4 deck both appeared to be particularly weak.



Plate 96. Pilot rescue pod, with inset of male Siskin. © Photographer



Plate 97. Meadow Pipit recovered from inside the ship. © Tony Tindale

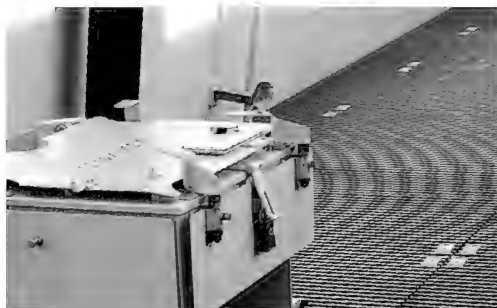


Plate 98. Robin at sea. © Photographer



Plate 99. Female Chaffinch. © Photographer

The land birds recorded were as follows:

- 5 Sep 21 - Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, (three overhead)
- 8 Sep 21 - Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, male
- 8 Sep 21 - Wheatear *Oenanthe oenanthe*
- 10–11 Sep 21 - Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, female/immature
- 10 Sep 21 - Siskin *Spinus spinus*, male
- 10 Sep 21 - Wheatear
- 11 Sep 21 - Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*
- 12 Sep 21 - Feral Pigeon *Columbo livia domestica*, (two racing pigeons)
- 12 Sep 21 - Robin *Erithacus rubecula*
- 13 Sep 21 - Siskin *Spinus spinus*
- 14 Sep 21 - Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*, female
- 14 Sep 21 - Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*
- 14 Sep 21 - Meadow Pipit *Anthus pratensis*, five plus
- 15 Sep 21 - Garden Warbler *Sylvia borin*

From a sea watching perspective I had the good fortune to encounter several Great Skuas *Stercorarius skua* including a sighting of three on the 12th that took off together from the water. The first of two sightings of Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus* was also a joy as I watched it continually harass eight Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* in typical skua style. Gannet *Morus bassanus*, Fulmar *Fulmarus glacialis*, Guillemot *Uria aalge* and the common species of gull were routinely observed, and I added two Razorbills *Alca torda* to the trip list on the final day.

Tony Tindale

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Report from HMS Echo

by Lieutenant P Boak, RN

(Photographs by the author, except where indicated)

The last year has been busy for HMS *Echo* and her ship's company, with deployments to the South Barents Sea and the Mediterranean as well as work in UK waters. This has led to plenty of opportunities to observe wildlife, and it is good to report that several new members of the RNBWS have been recruited.

August–September 2021 - the South Barents Sea

This was the period of the greatest operational output, and also the best time for wildlife. HMS *Echo* carried out her core task of Military Data Gathering (MDG) whilst demonstrating the ability for sustained and independent deployment in the high north environment. It was also a bit of a PR deployment, centred on the commemoration of the WW2 Arctic Convoys, and included the search for the wrecks of HMS *Edinburgh* and HMS *Trinidad*, and the interaction with the Russian *Slava* class Guided Missile Cruiser *Marshal Ustinov* at a commemoration service marking the 80th anniversary of the start of the Arctic Convoys. This last resulted in *Echo* being favourably mentioned in a high-profile address on 31 August 2021 by the Commander of the Russian Northern Fleet, Admiral Alexander Moiseev, about the shared history of our two nations. This of course was well before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The survey of the wreck of HMS *Edinburgh*

HMS *Edinburgh* was a Town Class light cruiser, built by Swan Hunter, and commissioned in 1939 shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War. When Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, Britain and her allies began to send aid to Russia via Arctic convoys, making the perilous journey to the Russian ports of Archangel or Murmansk - convoys that came under frequent attack from German aircraft, surface ships and submarines. On 30 April 1942 HMS *Edinburgh*, part of the escort for convoy QP11 returning from Murmansk, was hit by two torpedoes from the German submarine U456 and was severely crippled. The cruiser was then taken in tow but was later attacked by three German Destroyers (*Hermann Schoeman*, Z24 & Z25). Despite being out of control, *Edinburgh* managed to engage and mortally wound the *Hermann Schoeman*, but a torpedo from one of the other destroyers found its mark. Virtually broken in half, *Edinburgh* was finally sunk by a torpedo from HMS



Plate 100. HMS *Edinburgh*. © IWM

Foresight on 2 May. Fifty eight men died in the many attacks. HMS *Edinburgh* would later become famous for the post-war salvage of the 4,570kg of gold she was carrying. As for *Echo's* part in this, our ship managed to locate and survey the wreck using her Multi Beam Echo Sounder (MBES) and Side Scan Sonar (SSS), revealing the huge amount of damage that the wreck had suffered.

The search for the wreck of HMS *Trinidad*

HMS *Trinidad* was another casualty of the Russian convoys. This Colony class light cruiser was built in HM Dockyard Devonport and commissioned in 1941. Whilst escorting Convoy PQ13 in March 1942, she encountered a force of German destroyers. She hit and damaged the destroyer Z26, before then launching a torpedo attack. Unfortunately, one of the torpedoes developed a fault, and began a giant circle, hitting *Trinidad* and causing severe damage. The cruiser was towed clear of the action, and taken to Murmansk for immediate repairs, inevitably later becoming infamous as 'the ship that torpedoed itself'. After several cold and desolate months alongside in Murmansk undergoing repairs, including the welding of hull plates to repair the damage from her own torpedo, *Trinidad* began the long journey back to the UK on 13 May 1942, her top speed limited to 20 knots. En route, she was attacked by over 20 German JU88 bombers, and a direct hit caused a serious fire, with 63 men



Plate 101. HMS *Trinidad*. © IWM

losing their lives, including 20 men from the *Edinburgh*. Unsalvageable, *Trinidad* was sunk on 15 May 1942 by a torpedo from HMS *Matchless*. Now, in 2021, it was *Echo's* job to find the wreck (only an approximate position of the sinking was known) and survey it, and while our sonars found an intriguing feature at the expected datum of her sinking, no conclusive images were obtained to confirm whether the feature was natural or man-made.

Barents wildlife

Whilst operating in the Barents Sea, a significant amount of wildlife was observed, with perhaps the greatest highlight being the sighting of a pod of over 30 Killer Whales *Orcinus orca*. Meanwhile, the ship's superstructure provided temporary refuge for many landbirds blown far out to sea. These included Redpoll *Carduelis flammea*,



Plate 102. Orcas.



Plate 103. Redpoll.



Plate 104. Chiffchaff.



Plate 105. Kittiwakes.

Purple Sandpiper *Calidris maritima* and Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*. Seabirds were also plentiful, including large numbers of Kittiwakes *Rissa tridactyla*, Gannets *Morus bassanus* and Fulmars *Fulmarus glacialis*. Most exciting was the occasional Pomarine Skua *Stercorarius pomarinus*, which would harry the Kittiwakes and send them into a frenzy around the ship. There was one disappointment: despite the high latitude that *Echo* was operating in, the Northern Lights *Aurora borealis* were observed on only one occasion, when the clouds parted for a brief but spectacular moment.

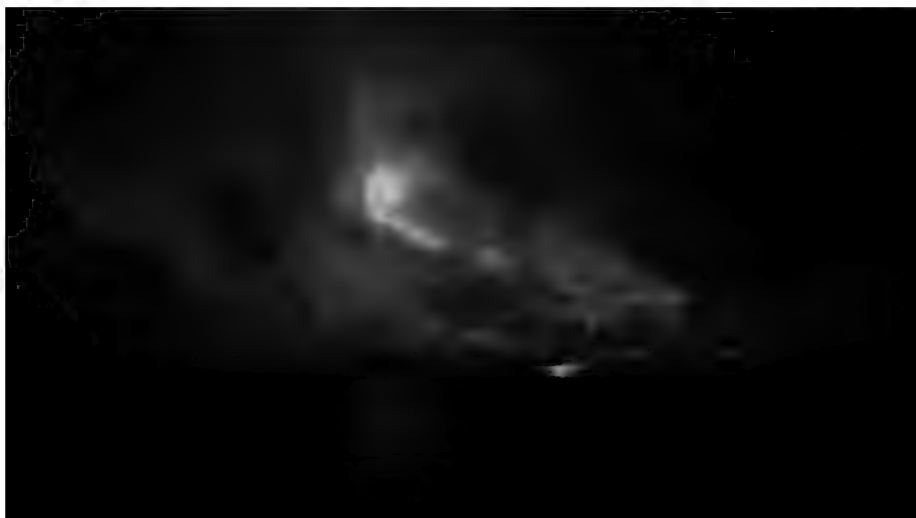


Plate 106. Aurora Borealis.



Plate 107. Pomarine Skua.



Plate 108. Gannet.



Plate 109. Fulmar.

UK waters and Gibraltar

For the rest of 2021 *Echo* operated in UK waters, before heading south towards Gibraltar for Christmas and the New Year. Whilst off the coast of Scotland in October, a flock of Bramblings *Fringilla montifringilla* alighted on the ship, but sadly most perished after a couple of days onboard. A second Purple Sandpiper was also spotted, (could it have been the same one from the Barents, we wondered?) and a resourceful Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* also took refuge on the ship. In contrast to the Bramblings, the Starling seemed to thrive, sheltering in the Towed Body Workshop during the cold nights. Initially it was something of a novelty, until its droppings led to it being expelled from the ship, and last seen heading for dry land. Another bird success story was when a European Storm-petrel *Hydrobates pelagicus* was discovered on board off the coast of Skye in November 2021. The tiny sparrow-sized bird was discovered

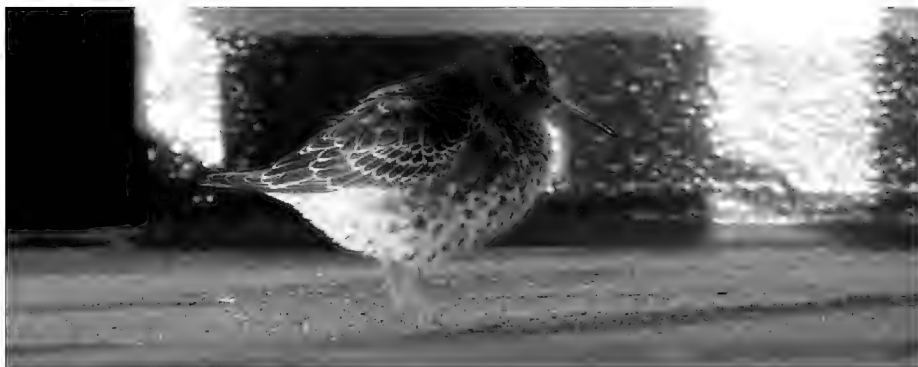


Plate 110. Purple Sandpiper.



Plate 111. Starling.



Plate 112. Brambling.



Plate 113. European Storm-petrel

sheltering on the ships Vertical Replenishment (VERTREP) deck. After seeking advice from more knowledgeable members of the RNBWS, the bird was carefully placed in a shoebox and kept indoors over the course of the day. After sunset the bird was released by new members Ben Stoddard and Beth Shorland from the Quarterdeck of the ship. The tiny bird was last seen flying confidently over the waves.

Towards the end of 2021 *Echo* left UK waters for Gibraltar and the Mediterranean, with the ship spending Christmas and New Year deployed. Whilst in Gibraltar, Barbary Macaques *Macaca sylvanus* were encountered at close range, as well as a Green Turtle *Chelonia mydas* in the warmer waters of the Mediterranean. One last wildlife related highlight was a Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, spotted by new member Ryan Dickinson on the Quarterdeck of *Echo* whilst on passage back to the UK in early 2022.

Sadly, this will be the last report from HMS *Echo*, for the ship was decommissioned on 30 June 2022 after 19 years of service. It is hoped that the new members from *Echo* will go on to other ships and help inspire the next generation of RNBWS members.

Philip Boak

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Plate 114. Black Redstart.



Plate 115. Decommissioning of HMS *Echo*.



Plate 116. Macaroni Penguin.

Macaroni Penguin at Macquarie Island

by Keith Betton

(photographs by the author)

In November 2018 I joined the annual tour of the sub-Antarctic islands organized by Heritage Expeditions using the 1759 ton *Spirit of Enderby* (formerly *Professor Khromov*). This is a fully ice-strengthened expedition vessel built in 1983 for polar and oceanographic research. She carries just 50 passengers and is perfect for exploring these islands. Previously I shared my trip log in *Sea Swallow* 69 (2019) 49–61.

The most unexpected species on that trip was an adult Macaroni Penguin *Eudyptes chrysolophus* at Sandy Bay, Macquarie Island 54.6S; 158.9E on 17 November 2018. The bird was on a sandy beach at the north end of Sandy Bay, about 15 m from the sea with about 100 Royal Penguins *Eudyptes schlegeli*. It was found by a member of the expedition team and news travelled fast among the passengers. Here I provide details of this sighting, which has now been accepted by the Birds Australia Records Committee as the third record for Australia.

Description

Slightly smaller (5–10%) than the Royal Penguins it was with. Head and throat black, leading to a clear cut off to a white breast and belly (in contrast, Royal Penguin has white face and neck continuing to white breast and belly). Thin gold crest plumes with a few black ones extending from the middle of the forehead back across the crown. Nape and back black. Details of flippers were not noted. Dark orange bill brightest on the upper mandible. The bill was clearly shorter than that of the nearest Royal Penguin with a more bulbous tip. A pale pink triangular patch of bare skin extended from the gape to just below the eye. The iris was dark red (compared to reddish-brown on the Royal Penguin). Details of legs and feet were not noted.

The two previous Australian records were also on Macquarie Island. The first was an adult male collected in December 1957 by Robert Falla. This is in the Museum of New Zealand in Wellington as specimen DM 8963. Many years later an individual was noted at Sandy Bay in January 2014 by Graham Barwell and Samuel Blanc. It is possible that this was the same bird that I saw, but it was not noted in expeditions in 2015–2017.

Keith Betton

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Cornell Birds of the World <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/macpen1/cur/introduction>



Plate 117. Macaroni Penguin.



15th International Seabird Group Conference, Cork, Ireland 22–25 August 2022

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN

Earlier conferences have been hosted by Universities in Liverpool, Edinburgh (*Sea Swallow* 65: 86) and Oxford (*Sea Swallow* 63: 93–95). This year the Group's host was the University College Cork, sited on the River Lee at the head of the second largest natural harbour in the world. I was last in Ireland in 1966 on MV *Cienfuegos* with a bulk cargo of Jamaican sugar, an essential ingredient for the stout so favoured by the locals. This 2022 event attracted over 200 delegates from across the world who came to present their new research and join in debate and discussions, stimulated by 60 technical papers. These covered fisheries, renewables, pollution and toxicology, feeding habits, behaviour modelling to assess where best to place wind farms; plus 50 papers presented in poster format in the reception area as speaking slots were full. As a mariner who enjoys watching birds at sea on passage, on a pelagic cruise or from a headland, what turns up and where is exciting. Changing climate, warming seas, increasing wind speeds and moving fish stocks are all factors impacting both seabird distribution and seabird numbers. For example, it was a revelation to learn from Benjamin Merkel from Tromsø that 10% of Atlantic seabirds rely on the Barents Sea, a highly productive shelf sea in the European Arctic. With the progression of ice melt it is expected that there will be no sea ice in the Arctic in a decade or so.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza

A devastating outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) occurred in 2022 on Coquet Island, Northumberland. The RSPB estimated that 54% of Roseate Terns have been lost due to bird flu, 19.6% of Common Terns and 12.8% of Arctic Terns. In a Group workshop to determine how best to react to these outbreaks, data from the Department

for Environment and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) showed how this pathogen had spread across Europe since 2020 through poultry farms and wild bird populations.

In evidence from Scotland's Nature Agency (NatureScot) a Bonxie had been seen feeding on dead Bonxies, and a Kestrel died after scavenging on corpses. In Scotland, NatureScot also reported the first outbreak in a Bonxie on St Kilda in 2021. In April 2022 Eider and Great Black-backed Gull tested positive, while in the third week of May Troup Head Nature Reserve, Aberdeenshire reported 85 dead Gannets and in Orkney there were widespread reports of dead birds of several species. The numbers then increased dramatically with more than 1,000 dead Gannets and more than 100 Bonxies at Hermaness. By July more than 700 dead Gannets and 200 Bonxies were reported from Noss; 1,000 Bonxies at Foula (3% of the world breeding population); 1,000 Gannets at Bass Rock and large numbers of Guillemots washed up on the west coast of Scotland. In all 11 different species were affected. Reports also came from Norfolk, the Netherlands, Germany and the USA. The first indication of burrow nesting species being infected came from two Manx Shearwaters on Rum plus Puffins. As we go to print 1,400 Bonxies died on Foula alone; 5,000 Gannets on Bass Rock and with Guillemots and Razorbills fledging there were large rafts of dead auks reported at sea.

What can we do? Follow biosecurity measures if visiting near colonies. Be vigilant and report sightings of corpses on shore or at sea to DEFRA.

Biologging

If you want to know about distribution: where seabirds feed; where they go in the post-breeding season and how they behave

around windfarms for example, then the biggest game changer has been in the technology used, especially in the miniaturisation of tracking devices and the availability of GPS satellite or GSM tracking devices rather than the earlier less sensitive GLS (geolocators) attachments. The relative ease for collecting position, temperature, dive depth, altitude with attachments to legs, on the tail feathers or back harness opens up so many opportunities to learn more about seabird behaviour and movements. We saw examples of the use of time-lapse photography, enabling nest monitoring in remote areas for guillemots and penguins and providing answers to questions like when do the birds arrive, when do they lay, who does the feeding and how do they cohabit or compete with neighbours and what is their reproductive success? On a much larger scale Hallvard Strøm of the Norwegian Polar Institute presented research based on large scale tracking of seabirds in the North Atlantic using SEATRACK data, in which partners from ten countries aim to identify year-round distribution and movements of seabird breeding in colonies across the northern part of the Atlantic. To date 16,866 loggers have been deployed on 11 species in 57 colonies. Data from 6,380 (38%) retrieved loggers has been analysed and compiled. This has enabled mapping to show the marine habitats for different populations and how these may overlap with offshore human activities. Species currently covered include Atlantic Puffin, Guillemot, Shag, Fulmar and Kittiwake. It is planned to add Leach's Storm-petrel, Razorbill, Bonxie, Northern Gannet and Arctic Tern to the project.

Fisheries

Whilst there have been some advances in reducing bycatch in ocean fisheries (see *Sea Swallow* 69: 15–19), particularly in New Zealand, it remains a substantial and intractable issue in Europe. We heard of major bird losses in purse seine fishery catching herring in northern Norwegian waters and in the Baltic Long-tailed Duck and Scoter were victims. Signe Christensen-Dalsgaard of the Norwegian Institute for Nature Research said, 'Most fishing events resulted in zero bycatch, but the few bycatch events registered involved a large number of gulls that drowned within the gear'.

Evidence for this comes from beachcast bodies that forensic examination shows they were drowned.

Whilst off the Portuguese coast Marine Protected Areas (MPA) have been established, their effectiveness as a conservation tool is still under scrutiny. The official MPAs protect nearly 65% of the area for breeding species, but less than 4% for non-breeding species. Jorge Pereira of the University of Coimbra reported a study that showed fixed bottom nets had the highest seabird-fisheries interactions with the most abundant species Yellow-legged and Lesser Black-backed Gulls (27.6%), Northern Gannet (23.2%) and Cory's Shearwater (13.4%). Interviews with fishermen showed that Gannets were the most bycaught species.

In the Bay of Biscay a study reported by Mathilde Huon of La Rochelle Université, sought to understand the impact of fishery discards on seabird ecology in a major fishing zone and major wintering area for seabirds in Europe. Northern Gannets and large gulls showed a preference for round fish smaller than 30 cm. Over the study period 2014–18 scavenging seabirds consumed on average less than 2% of discards per event in spring and less than 5% in autumn.

Black-capped Petrel *Pterodroma hasitata*

To complete this round up of papers one that took my notice concerned the critically endangered Caribbean gadfly petrel *P. hasitata*, locally known as the Diablotin. Yvan Satgé of the International Black-capped Petrel Conservation Group said the population is estimated at about 2,000 pairs potentially nesting in five countries. To date only 100 nests have been located in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. A quick examination of the RNBWS database shows 38 sightings from 1964 to 2014.

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Seabird reports 2021

by Captain Stephen Chapman, MN

In the year 2021 reports of seabirds at sea were received from the following observers, and will be added to the database:

David Ballance: a booklet with birds observed during the voyage of *MV Queen Elizabeth* from Southampton to Port of Tyne, Invergordon, Belfast, Greenock and Liverpool returning to Southampton in October 2021.

Malcolm Calvert: two voyages: the first, on board *MV Balmoral* from Southampton to Funchal, Madeira, Santa Cruz, La Palma, Santa Cruz, Tenerife, San Sebastian, La Gomera, Las Palmas, Lisbon and return to Southampton in December 2011. Three page report noting 28 species.

The second: *MV Borealis* Departing Liverpool (after delay by storm) to Arrecife, Lanzarote, Puerto del Rosario, Fuerteventura, Las Palmas, Santa Cruz, Tenerife, San

Sebastian, La Gomera, Santa Cruz, La Palma and return to Liverpool in December 2021. Three page report noting 29 species.

Lieutenant Philip Boak: submitted a report from *HMS Echo* deployed in the Baltic in January 2021 and in May off the NW of Britain; published in *Sea Swallow* 70: 60–65. See also his report on pages 64–69 of this issue.

Warrant Officer Tony Tindale: sent observations of seabirds and land birds from his time on board *HMS Prince of Wales* in the English Channel and North Sea in September 2021. Excel worksheet.

Also received: observations of seabirds from *HMS Montrose* in the Arabian Sea in December 2021. Excel worksheet.

Please continue sending your records to: data@rnbws.org.uk. Thank you.



Plate 118. Little Tern. © Martin Alabaster

Some selected seabird highlights from the ornithological press

The following is the usual trawl through press and bird journals that feature seabird distribution news that have crossed my desk in the last year. Some are from journals that we receive in exchange for *Sea Swallow*.

The African Bird Club

First record for Zambia of Little Tern

Sterna albifrons

Frank Willems, Wouter van Spijker, Matthews Chilenge, Florian Richter and Jonathan Henshaw. *Bull ABC* 29.1 p86–91.

On 20 March 2020, FW & WvS, with other birders were at the sandy ‘Chunga Tongue’, Chunga Lake, Lochinvar National Park, Southern Province (c.15°50’79”S, 27°13’45”E). While checking a large group of terns dominated by White-winged *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Whiskered Terns *C. hybrida*, with several Caspian Terns *Hydroprogne caspia* and a few Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica*, a tiny tern suddenly drew FW’s attention. Its small size, rapid jerky flight and long thin bill immediately pointed to a *Sternula* species. The bird was photographed; it appeared to be in non-breeding, possibly immature, plumage.

First confirmed record of Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* for São Tomé

Lionel Sineux. *Bull ABC* 29.1 p96.

On 23 November 2019, Lionel Sineux visited the Sete Pedras islets, c. 5 km SE of São Tomé (00°02’17”N, 06°37’48”E), where, among other species, he observed several White-tailed Tropicbirds *Phaethon lepturus*. On the way back to the main island, he noticed two more tropicbirds near São Tomé’s coast, flying low over the waves out to sea. Their long tail streamers indicated they were adults and they were easily identified as Red-billed Tropicbirds *P. aethereus* by their bright red bill and narrowly black-barred upperparts, which distinguish this species from White-tailed Tropicbird. This appears to be the first photographically documented record of Red-billed Tropicbird for São Tomé island.

British Birds

‘Mandt’s Black Guillemot’ in Lincolnshire: new to Britain

Dave Roberts. *British Birds* 114 March 2021: 166–171.

A Black Guillemot *Cephus grille* was present at Cut End on the River Witham in Lincolnshire on 7–10 December 2017. Its strikingly white appearance suggested it belonged to the high-Arctic breeding form ‘Mandt’s Black Guillemot’ *C.g. mandti*, previously unrecorded from Britain.

Report on rare birds in Great Britain in 2020

Chas Holt, Paul French and the Rarities Committee. *British Birds* 114 October 2021: 570–628.

The annual report by the Rarities Committee again illustrates, if nothing else, that one doesn’t necessarily need to sail the seven seas to see exciting seabirds. Taxa with ten or fewer records in this report include: 1st Southern Giant/Northern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus/halli*, White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis*, 1st–3rd South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*, 1st–5th Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster*, 3rd Scopoli’s Shearwater *Calonectris diomedea* and 3rd & 4th ‘Band-rumped Storm-petrel’ *Oceanodroma castro/jabejabe/monteiroi*. In addition there were records of 14 Bonaparte’s Gulls *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*, Ross’s Gull *Rhodostethia rosea*, Laughing Gull *Leucophaeus atricilla*, Franklin’s Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan*, American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia*, Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* (with a ring), Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*, a single Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, Fea’s/Desertas Petrel *Pterodroma feae/deserta*, and Zino’s/Fea’s/Desertas Petrel *Pterodroma madeira/feae/deserta*. The White-chinned Petrel *Procellaria aequinoctialis* was seen and photographed in Scapa Flow, Orkney on 25th May 2020, as the reviewer stated it’s not often that a bird is seen and photographed well but still defies identification. This was the predicament faced by Robert Foubister while walking along the edge of Scapa Flow. When the photographs of the mystery bird were shared online, the identification was narrowed



Plate 119. Northern Giant Petrel. © Tony Tindale



Plate 120. Southern Giant Petrel. © Tony Tindale

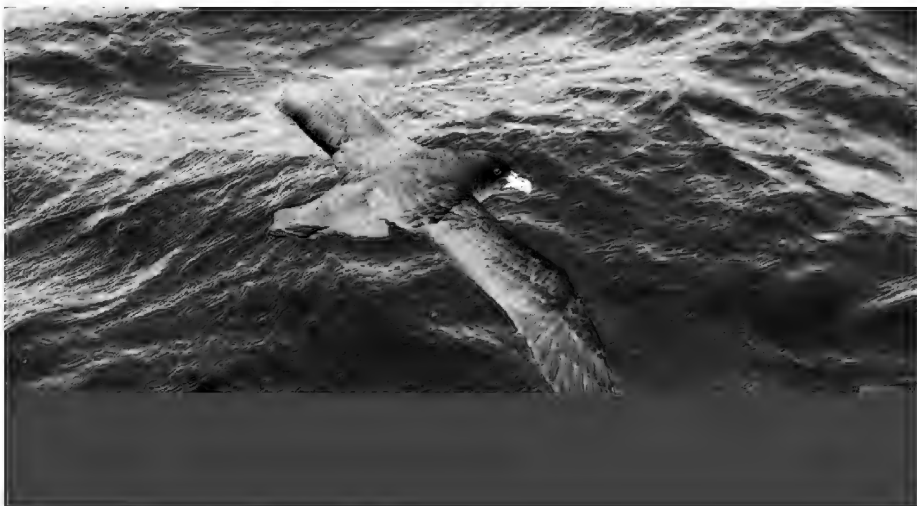


Plate 121. White-chinned Petrel. © Tony Tindale

down to a *Procellaria* petrel, a genus not previously recorded from the Western Palearctic. Only then did the enormity of the find become clear. Only one of the five species in the genus shows an all-dark plumage with a white patch of feathering at the base of the bill: White-chinned Petrel.

This find can only whet the appetites of sea watchers all around Britain, and it also highlights, the central role the accessibility of high-quality digital photography is having on record assessment.

Again without wishing to be too parochial these annual Reports make interesting reading for a land-based birder.

**The British Ornithologists' Club
A revised bird checklist for the oceanic
islands of the Gulf of Guinea (Príncipe,
São Tomé and Annobón)**

Ricardo F. de Lima & Martim Melo *Bull BOC* 141 (2): 179–198.

The authors present an updated bird checklist for the oceanic islands of the Gulf of Guinea. Their avifauna comprises 146 confirmed species, an increase of 19% in 15 years. Of these, 66 are resident landbird species, including 29 endemic species, 17 endemic subspecies and 17 possibly non-native species. The remaining avifauna consists of six breeding seabird species, four

non-breeding migrants, 62 vagrants and eight species of uncertain status. Most recent changes reflect increases in observer activity and involve vagrant and unconfirmed species, but a few result from previously overlooked historical records and taxonomic changes. Of the three islands, most changes affected the avifauna of Príncipe, whereas little new information has come from Annobón. What strikes the reviewer is the lack of solid data on seabird species.

**The status of Great-winged Petrel
Pterodroma macroptera in the south-
west Atlantic Ocean, with notes on
separation from dark-morph Trindade
Petrel *P. arminjoniana***

Leal Valls, Fernanda Caminha, Tavares, Mauricio, Flood, Robert Louis, and Bugoni, Leandro *Bull BOC* 141(3): 267–275.

Great-winged Petrel is currently considered uncommon in the south-west Atlantic Ocean. However, via a compilation of all recent records available, the authors found evidence of a regular, wider distribution from breeding colonies in Tristan da Cunha and Gough towards South America. These records are reviewed, a new beach stranding in Brazil is reported, which is the northernmost record in the south-west Atlantic, and the problems of at-sea separation of Great-winged Petrel from the darkest-plumaged Trindade Petrel *P. arminjoniana* are discussed.

Pelagic birds around Rapa and Marotiri, French Polynesia, October–December 2019, with notes on Rapa Shearwater *Puffinus myrtae* and Titan Storm Petrel *Fregatta [grallaria] titan*

Robert L. Flood, Kirk Zufelt, Vincent Bretagnolle & Hadoram Shirihihi *Bull BOC* 141 (4) 387–411.

The authors report pelagic observations from around Rapa Island and Marotiri Rocks, in the Austral Islands, French Polynesia, made during the first dedicated at-sea survey of birds in the region, during October–December 2019. They write: we recommend that the regional occurrence of several seabird species be modified and that the list of avifauna for Rapa and Marotiri, the Austral Islands, and East Polynesia variously be amended to include Juan Fernández Petrel *Pterodroma externa*, Mottled Petrel *P. inexpectata*, Gould's Petrel *P. leucoptera*, Stejneger's Petrel *P. longirostris*, Buller's Shearwater *Ardenna bulleri* and Arctic Skua *Stercorarius parasiticus*. Two Gould's Petrels were behaving as if breeding, and the timing of egg laying by Christmas Shearwater *Puffinus nativitatis* is apparently somewhat earlier than the species' other populations. We found Polynesian Storm Petrel *Nesofregatta fuliginosa* foraging in large numbers around Marotiri suggesting a hitherto unrecognised and perhaps significant breeding population; we also found large numbers around Rapa. Titan Storm Petrel *Fregatta (grallaria) titan* foraged off Rapa in substantial numbers and c. 5% appeared to be a variant, raising the possibility of two distinctive phenotypes. We include at-sea images and a field description of 'classic' Rapa Shearwater *Puffinus myrtae*, and report an unidentified small *Puffinus* seen at Marotiri.

Our survey adds significant new information to knowledge of seabirds in this region, and in combination with previous work argues strongly for the conservation of Rapa, Marotiri and the surrounding ocean's pelagic birds.

**British Ornithologists' Union
Cross-icecap spring migration confirmed in a high-Arctic seabird, the Ivory Gull *Pagophila eburnea***

Morten Frederiksen, Olivier Gilg, Glenn Yannic *Ibis* (2021), 163: 706–713.

Seabirds rarely cross major terrestrial barriers during seasonal migration, possibly because they have a limited ability to build up fat stores. For the first time, we tracked two Ivory Gulls with GPS loggers during spring migration from the wintering area in Davis Strait to the breeding colony in north-east Greenland. While one bird migrated in March around the southern tip of Greenland, the other delayed migration until May and crossed the Greenland icecap north of 70°N, covering 1,345 km in 29 h. Several aspects of the crossing were noteworthy: the track was remarkably direct, the bird made several stops (totalling 6 h) on the icecap, and the bird increased its flying altitude to nearly 3,000 m over West Greenland and > 4,000 m over East Greenland.

Post-fledging migration and wintering strategies of individual juvenile Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus*

Rahel M. Borrmann, Richard A. Phillips, Thomas A. Clay, Stefan Garthe *Ibis* (2021) 163: 1017–1031.

Research into the patterns and drivers of juvenile migration is important for understanding the development of individual migration strategies. Although several recent studies have tracked adult large gulls throughout the annual cycle, the movements of juveniles remain poorly understood. We fitted Global Positioning System (GPS) devices that transmit locations through the Global System for Mobile Communications (GSM) to ten juvenile Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* prior to fledging on the island of Spiekeroog, Germany, to study their first autumn migration and wintering behaviour. The tracked birds initially departed on similar compass bearings south to south-west, after which migration routes diverged. Individuals took 38–107 days to reach their wintering sites in Algeria, Morocco or Spain. Birds visited 6.7 ± 3.7 (mean \pm sd) stopover sites *en route* and spent substantial time in northern Europe, with some individuals converging at the same sites over small spatial scales (<1 km), but not over the same time periods. Birds increased travel speeds in the second half of their migration. They showed relatively high site-fidelity after arrival at wintering sites, and there was no evidence that the size of foraging areas increased over time, suggesting limited exploratory

behaviour. Individuals used the same predominant habitats - cropland, open water and built-up areas - to varying degrees, but showed limited variation in habitat use over time. Overall, the migration routes and timings of juveniles broadly resembled those of previously tracked adults.

Marine Ornithology

The Black Noddy *anous minutus*: a new breeding species for Chile

Manuel Marín, Rodrigo González & Sergio Marín *Marine Ornithology* 49: 79–82.

A small breeding population of Black Noddy *Anous minutus* was encountered on San Ambrosio Island in the Desventuradas Archipelago in the southeast Pacific off Chile. On 11 December 2019, we found eight Black Noddy nests among 50–60 nests of Brown Noddies *A. stolidus*. Black Noddy nests were placed on the ground with little to no nesting material in the interior of the island, which is an unusual nest type and placement for this species. All nests were at different stages, from recently hatched to recently fledged nestlings. Black Noddies usually nest in trees or bushes, but the vegetation on San Ambrosio had been largely extirpated, raising the possibility that this small population may have been larger prior to habitat loss. This is the first published

documented record of Black Noddies in Chile and is the southeasternmost breeding population of this species in the Pacific.

The Seabird Group

What do Yelkouan Shearwaters get up to during the non-breeding period?

Hannah Greetham, University of Glasgow.
The Seabird Group Newsletter, 146 February 2021 p9–11.

Where seabirds go after the breeding season has always been of interest to scientists. Recent advances in biologging technology has increased the knowledge about the non-breeding period of seabirds. Several *Procellariiformes* show intraspecific variation in non-breeding destinations and behaviours. These differences can occur between sexes leading to the sexes being exposed to different levels of threats, such as bycatch. Therefore, one sex could be more vulnerable and cause a skew in adult mortality, which has been recorded in declining seabird species. Yelkouan Shearwaters *Puffinus yelkouan* are a Mediterranean endemic seabird, classified as 'Vulnerable to extinction' by the IUCN due to low adult survival. Yelkouan Shearwaters breed in burrows between February and July and are presumed to moult at the beginning of the non-breeding period.



Plate 122. Black Noddy. © Steve Copsey

Two non-breeding strategies have been documented so far: either birds stay in the central Mediterranean or they head further east to the Black Sea. The aim of this study, in collaboration with University of Glasgow and BirdLife Malta, was to better understand the migratory strategies of Yelkouan Shearwaters, the schedule of migration and moult, and the location of the non-breeding and moult areas. In addition, to see if there are differences between the sexes in these strategies. Malta holds around 10% of the global breeding population distributed across a number of colonies around the archipelago. 27 breeding Yelkouan Shearwaters were captured from accessible nests in Malta in 2019 and equipped with geolocator-immersion loggers. In 2020, a season constrained by the COVID-19 pandemic and spells of unfavourable weather conditions, 44% of the loggers deployed were retrieved. Yelkouan Shearwaters breeding on Maltese islands either stayed in the central Mediterranean or migrated east. Moult occurred between August and October but varied between individuals. The first birds returned to the colony in October but others returned only in January. Inter-individual variation did not appear to be related to either sex or destination. Yelkouan Shearwaters increased their time spent on the water's surface during the non-breeding period compared with the breeding period due to relatively low energetic requirements while free from central place constraints and chick provisioning. Within the non-breeding period they spent more time sitting on the water during the night than during the day and then declined from November onwards as they returned to the colony. All Yelkouan Shearwaters spent the non-breeding period either in the central Mediterranean or they travelled east to Aegean and Black Sea. Birds generally moulted on their way to their wintering grounds. No differences between sexes were discovered in either the moult locations or the entire non-breeding period.

North West England Black-headed Gull study

Scott Petrek and Kane Brides *The Seabird Group Newsletter*, 147 June 2021 p4–5.

The Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* is often seen making use of human-derived food sources and its accessibility in public spots lends this often under studied species to be easily caught for further study.

Found across Europe and Asia the species has an estimated global population of between 4.8 to 8.9 million individuals, with around 2.2 million birds wintering in the British Isles.

The North West Black-headed Gull study began in 2011 and mainly targets full-grown wintering birds in the north west of England for colour-marking, with the majority of birds caught by hand when attempting to take food being offered. This study aims to learn more about the seasonal movements of Black-headed Gulls, including studying winter and summer site fidelity, looking at within winter movements and contribute to survival information. The project also includes the colour-marking of chicks and breeding birds in the region. By February 2021, over 1,200 individual birds have been colour-marked with blue alpha-numeric leg rings as part of the study, generating over 4,500 sightings from across the UK and from 16 countries across Europe with the majority of overseas re-sightings coming from Poland, Norway, Finland and Germany. To date, 75 birds have been recorded overseas (excluding Ireland). Ringing efforts from the most recent catching season (September to February) in the winter of 2020/21 produced our furthest known distance. An adult bird ringed at Southport Marine Lake, Merseyside, in December 2020 was later reported 2,552 km away on the River Lazur near Dubna, just north of Moscow. This becomes our fifth bird to be re-sighted in Russia. The vast majority of re-sightings at both wintering sites in the UK and breeding sites across Europe show the east to west movement of birds between the two periods. That said the 2020/21 season also produced an unusual movement of a wintering bird ringed on 15 November 2020 at Bowness-on-Windermere, Cumbria, which was then seen in Algés, near Lisbon, Portugal on 9 January 2021, becoming our first recovery to Portugal. Re-sightings of breeding birds and those ringed as chicks in our study area have shown similar direction of movement in a west or southerly direction with most re-sightings coming from Ireland. In the UK over 420,000 individuals have been ringed under the BTO ringing scheme since 1901, but the addition of using colour-marking has greatly increased our understanding of the species, including their site fidelity, particularly at the wintering sites.

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